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JUNE 2018 VOL 29 NO 9

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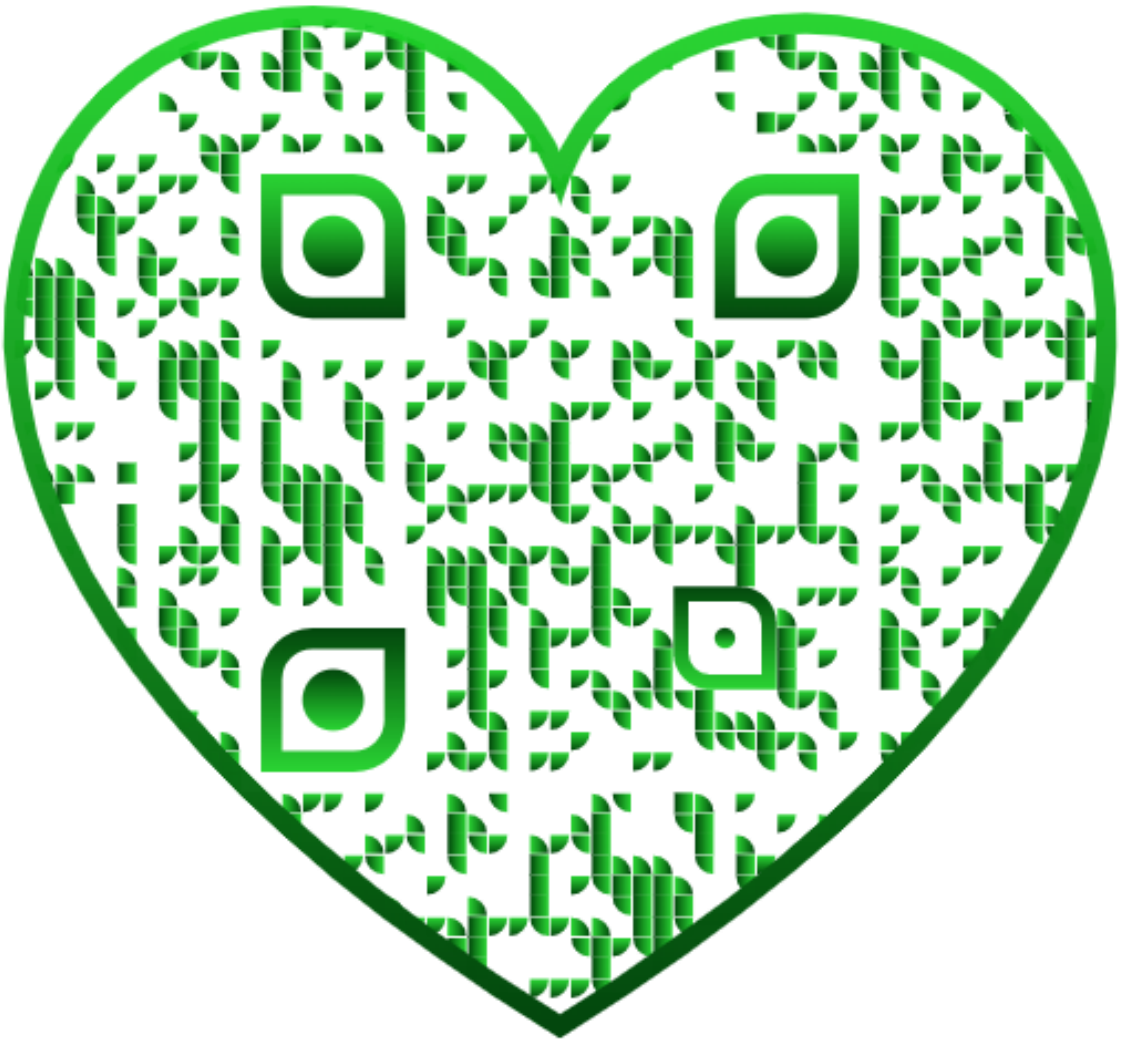

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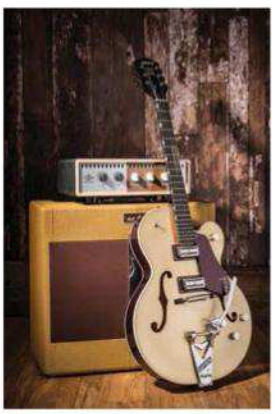
Old meets new...

Back at the Winter NAMM Show in January, one of the new products that set guitarists' pulses racing could be found in the unfamiliar environs of the area of the Anaheim Convention Center devoted to all things hi-tech. There, amid the DJ controllers, modular synthesisers and other mysterious devices with their flashing lights and strange electronic sounds was a corner of the Universal Audio stand devoted to guitar.

And there – sat atop a suitably road-worn Marshall Plexi head and 4x12 cabinet – was the OX Amp Top Box. Aside from looking pretty damn stylish and having a reassuringly low number of knobs on its front panel, an impressive demonstration delivered on its promise of capturing big, loud and organic-sounding valve amp tones with a pro-studio sheen... without shifting the kind of air that would usually feel like a punch to the chest. If you love your valve amplifier dearly but find it hard to capture great tones without peeling paint off the walls, read Huw Price's review of the Ox on p94 but be warned – you may never feel the same way about cabinet micing again.

Winding the clock back just 135 years or so, a 27-year-old German immigrant named Friedrich Gretsch founded a company manufacturing banjos, tambourines, and drums shortly after his arrival in Brooklyn, New York. The first Gretsch Anniversary guitars were launched back in 1958 to celebrate 75 years of the company's history and 60 years later they are as drop-dead gorgeous as they ever were. The class of 2018 is impressive too: read Huw Price's review of our coverstar and its two-tone Electromatic sibling on p20.

That's all from me for now – as usual head to youtube.com/theguitarmagazine to see and hear the hottest new gear in action, enjoy this month's magazine and I'll see you next time...



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THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS...

DAVE HUNTER

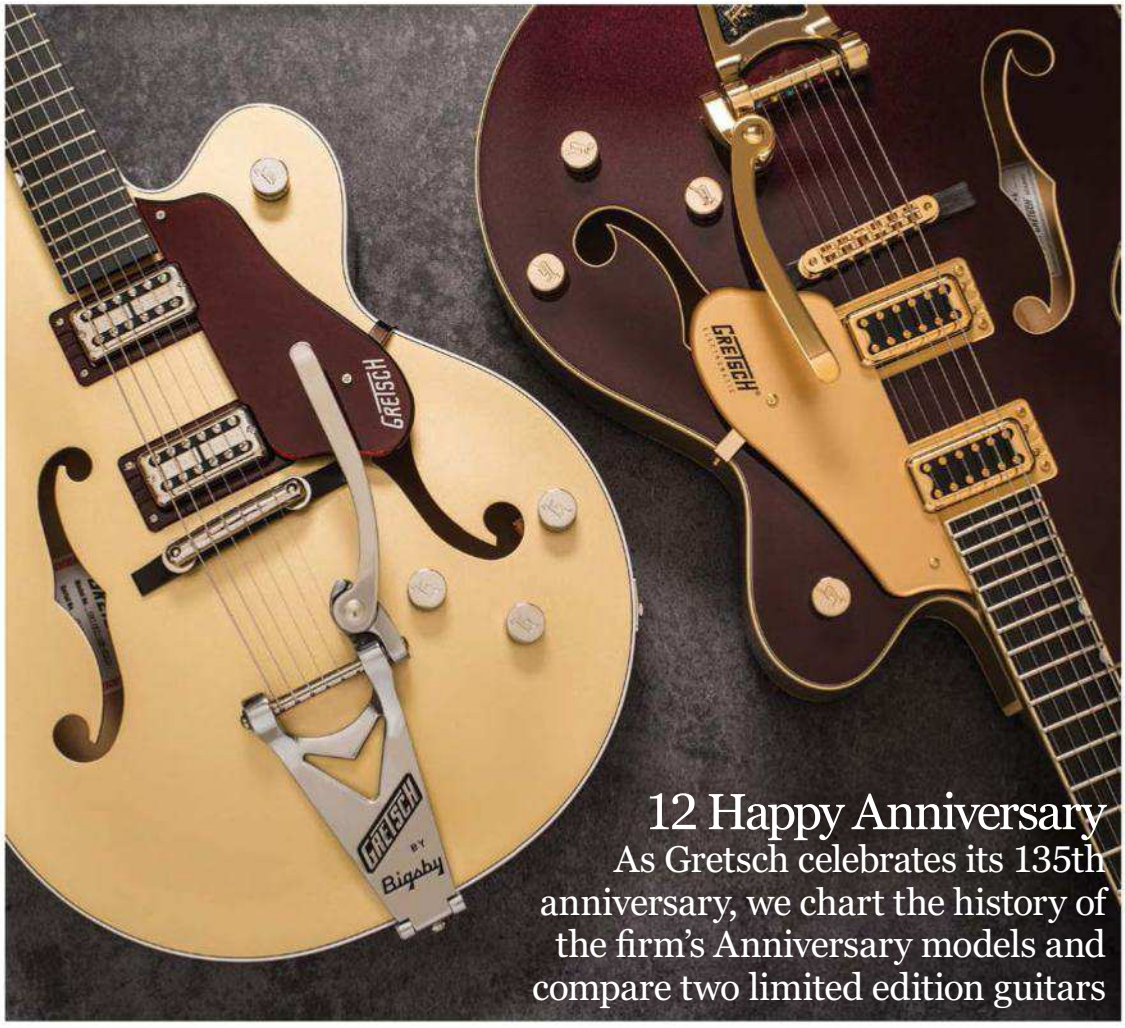
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*. Check out his column on p24

HUW PRICE

Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer, working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and Nick Cave. His book, *Recording Guitar & Bass*, was published in 2002, leading into his career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps & pedals

RICHARD PURVIS

A reformed drummer, Richard has been gigging for over 20 years as a guitarist and bassist, and working as a music journalist for almost as long. He also composes music for TV, and is legally married to his 1966 Gibson Melody Maker



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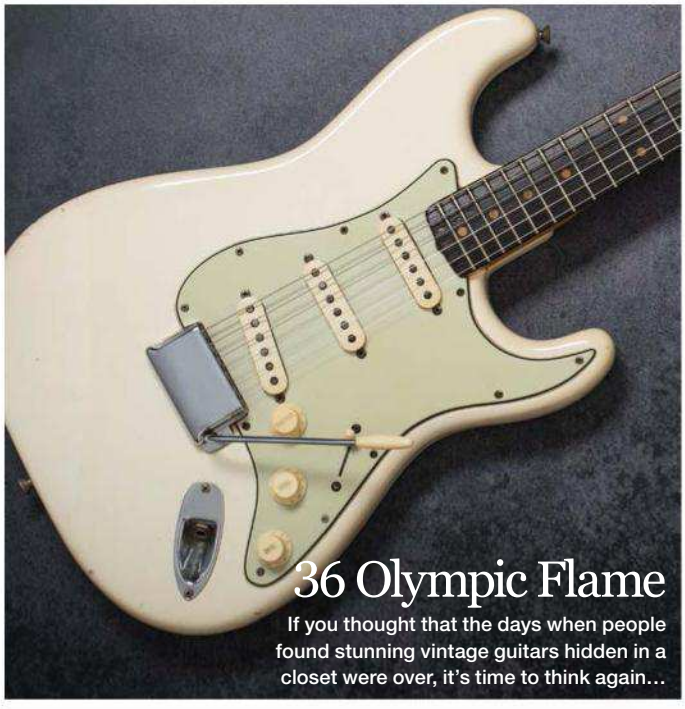
As Gretsch celebrates its 135th anniversary, we chart the history of the firm's Anniversary models and compare two limited edition guitars



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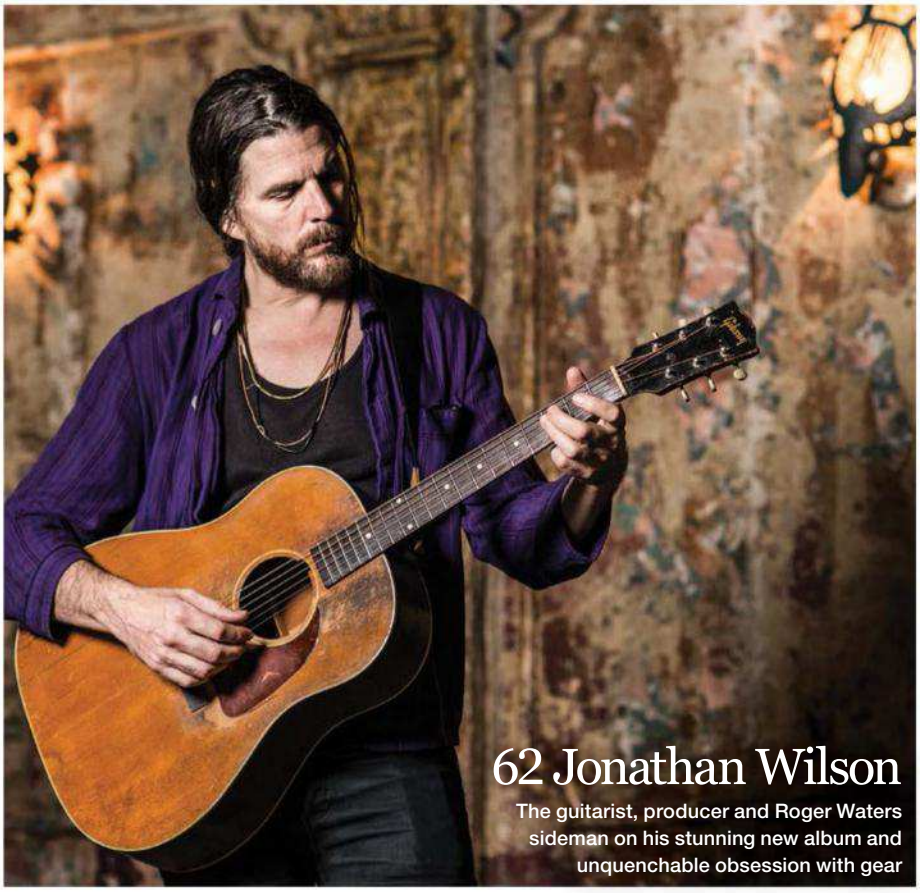

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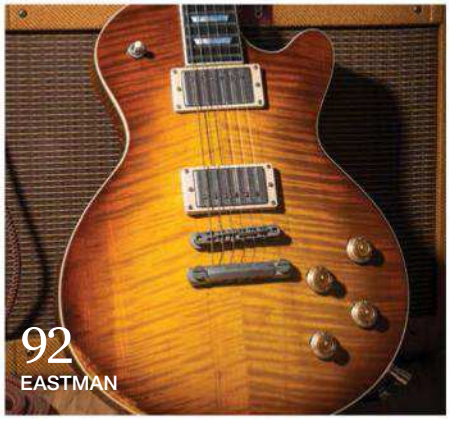

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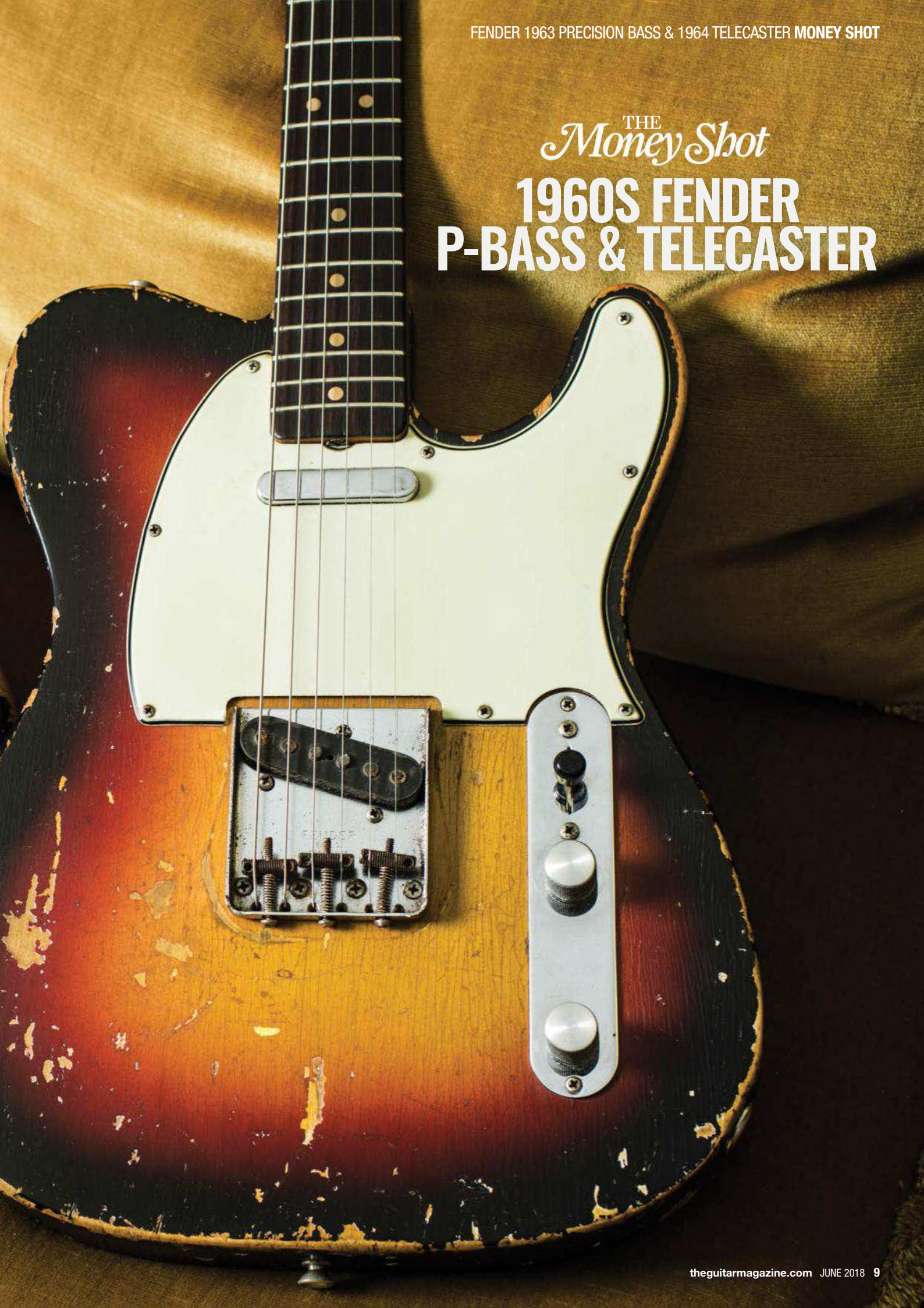
THE *Money Shot*

1960S FENDER P-BASS & TELECASTER

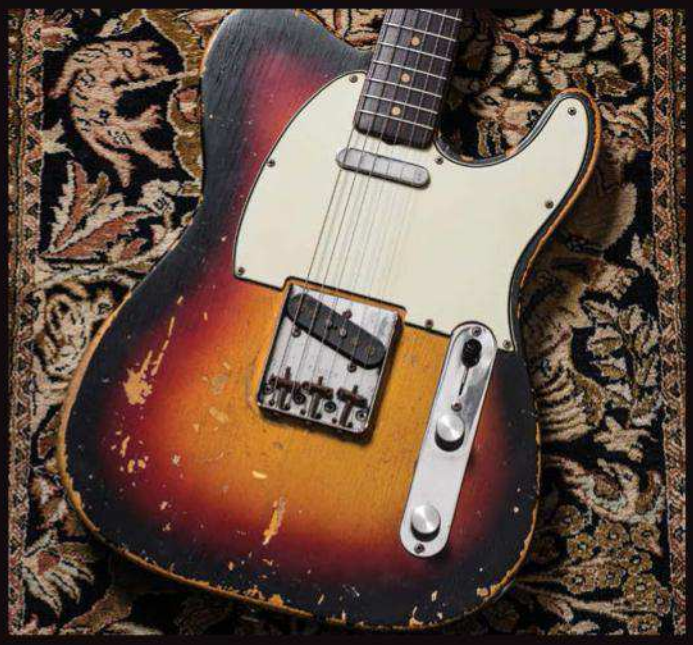


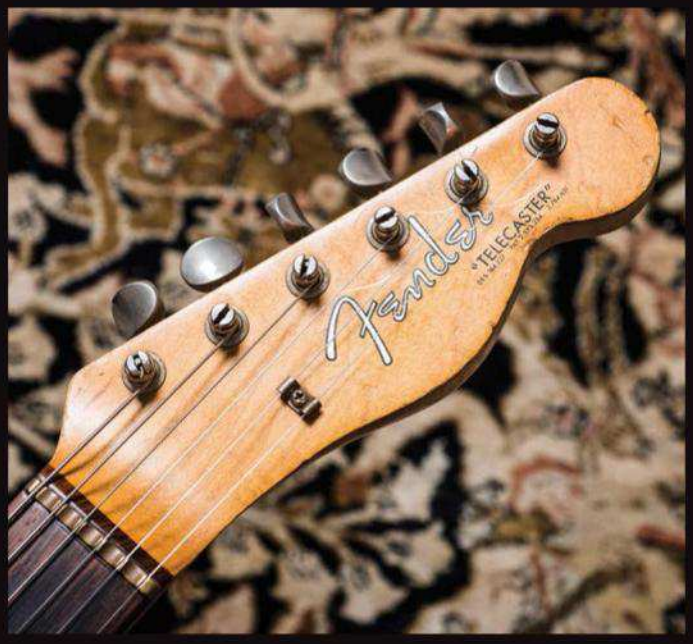
The 8 March guitar auction at Gardiner Houlgate in Corsham, Wiltshire, featured a staggering array of desirable vintage instruments, but two of our favourites were beaten-up sunburst Fenders from the first half of the 1960s.

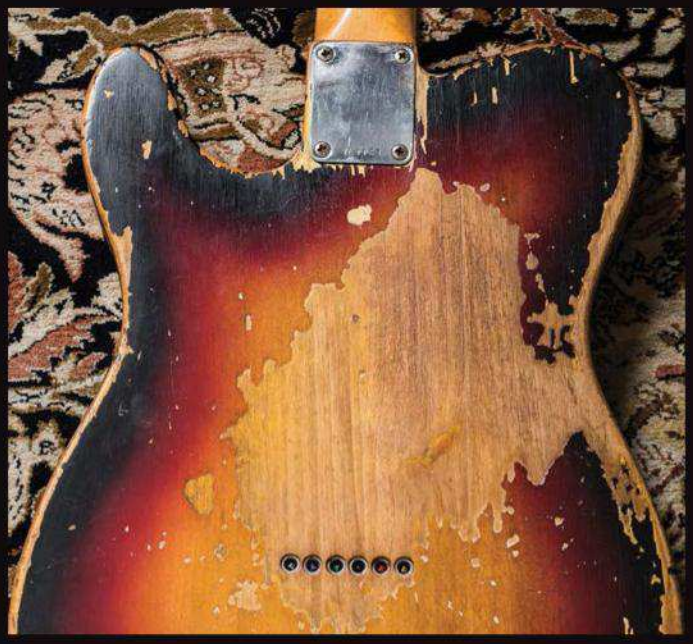
Formely owned by Stephen 'Amazing' Fields, who played with the band Upp and toured extensively as support to The Jeff Beck Group in the 1970s, this 1963 Fender Precision Bass is heavily worn but light, resonant and full of vibe. It's an instrument with a hell of a history but plenty of life left in it yet – its new owner picked it up for £4,600.

Further proof that there's just something undeniably alluring about a sunburst Fender with extensive road-wear came in the shape of the 1964 Telecaster that's getting cosy on the sofa with its four-string cousin on the previous pages. It's not without a handful of issues – the bridge pickup probaby needs a rewind and work had to be done to preserve the guitar's original finish after it was stored in a damp environment. But, as is so often the case with Fenders of the era that have been well-played, the neck feels glorious and the guitar still fetched a very healthy £8,928 when it went under the hammer.

The next Gardiner Houlgate guitar auction takes place on 14 June. Visit guitar-auctions.co.uk to peruse the catalogue.




Fender
"TELECASTER"



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HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

As Gretsch Guitars celebrates its 135th anniversary in style, Dave Hunter charts the history of one of the company's most famous electric date-markers – the Anniversary model

Many guitar companies now make anniversary models to celebrate milestones and special occasions, but most of these 'celebration guitars' are limited-run designs. The Gretsch Anniversary, however, quickly became a mainstay of the company's line-up when it debuted in the late 50s. Yet arguably more significant than its popularity at the time of issue is the way the Anniversary has held on as an enduring route to vintage Gretsch goodness, providing a relatively easy means for enthusiasts of the 21st century to lay their hands on the 'real thing' without digging too deeply into their pockets.

Unlike your typical limited edition or special release, the Anniversary models – introduced in 1958 to celebrate Gretsch's 75th anniversary – were priced at a level intended to bring as many customers as possible in on the celebration. Clearly the effort worked. Gretsch saw no reason to delete the model from the catalogue, and it evolved right alongside its siblings as this rather quirky company changed specs and components over the years, even as the brand's 100th anniversary eventually faded in the rear-view mirror.

Upon their arrival in '58, the Anniversary models were constructed the same as the cornerstone hollowbody models such as the 6120 Chet Atkins. Both had hollow bodies that were 16 inches wide and 2.5 inches deep, made from braced

laminated maple, with dual f-holes and rounded cutaways. Likewise, their necks had ebony fingerboards, and they were made to the shorter traditional 24.5-inch Gretsch scale length. The Single Anniversary had one Filter'Tron humbucking pickup in the neck position, a tone switch, and a single volume control on the rounded body 'horn'.

DOUBLE FUN

The Double Anniversary got its name from its two Filter'Tron pickups, and also added a three-way selector switch beside the tone switch on the upper bout, plus an individual volume control for each pickup in addition to the final master volume on the horn. Each was available in a sort of vintage sunburst finish that Gretsch called 'Shade', or a stylish 'Two-Tone', which had a light 'Smoke Green' on the top and contrasting darker green on the back and neck. Although the model numbers were generally less referred to than that of the eponymous 6120, the Anniversaries had theirs too: 6124 for the Single in sunburst and 6125 in Two-Tone, 6117 for the Double in sunburst and 6118 in Two-Tone.

Otherwise, what did the 6120 Chet Atkins Hollowbody of '58 and '58 have that the Double Anniversary lacked? A bound neck and headstock, bound f-holes, and a Bigsby – and that was about it. Oh, and Chet Atkins's name on the pickguard. Those were clearly a draw for plenty of players, but at $475 for the 6120 compared to $310 for the Double Anniversary, well, you can see why so many players snatched up the latter.

The Double Anniversary's bargain status circa 1958 to '59 translates to more affordable prices on today's vintage market when compared to a 6120 of the same period, and in similar condition. A quick survey of a few dealers – not the least bit scientific, mind you – confirms that a good 6120 from that time will easily fetch £7,500 or more, while a Double Anniversary can be had for half that, or even significantly less.

The Single Anniversary's specifications have made that model, however, far less appealing. Arguably the largest component of 'That Great Gretsch Sound' comes from the meaty twang of that Filter'Tron in the bridge position, and the Single Annie simply ain't got one. There are plenty of them out there, so clearly there was no shortage of players eager to take advantage of the bargain $225 price back in the day. Carry that forward to 2018, and it's not hard to find a vintage Single for somewhere in the region of half the price of the Double.

BACK IN THE DAY, THERE WERE MANY PLAYERS EAGER TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE BARGAIN PRICE

Of course, the keen-eyed and player-minded among us immediately see another form of bargain in that: grab an affordable Single Anniversary, add a Filter'Tron in the bridge position and a couple more knobs, and you've got a pretty reasonably priced 6120-alike, if it's a player's guitar you're after in the first place. Not that we whole-heartedly recommend this route: such modification requires careful consideration of the potential devaluation of an original vintage guitar, weighed alongside the expense of having such work done professionally.

BRILLIANT HIGHS

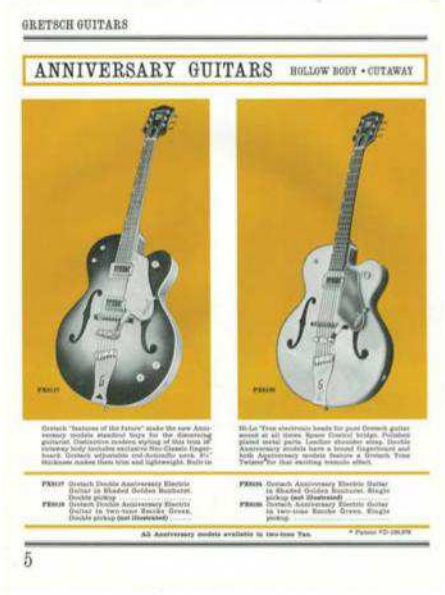
In 1960 Gretsch introduced its own in-house single-coil pickup, the Hilo'Tron, to replace the Model 200 (aka Dynasonic) they had previously been buying in from DeArmond. The new pickup looked something like a Filter'Tron with only one row of six adjustable pole pieces showing, protected by what was essentially a Filter'Tron cover with its centre band chopped down. But beneath the top plate lurked just one lightly-wound coil, positioned off to one side of the structure, with a magnet attached to it side-on.

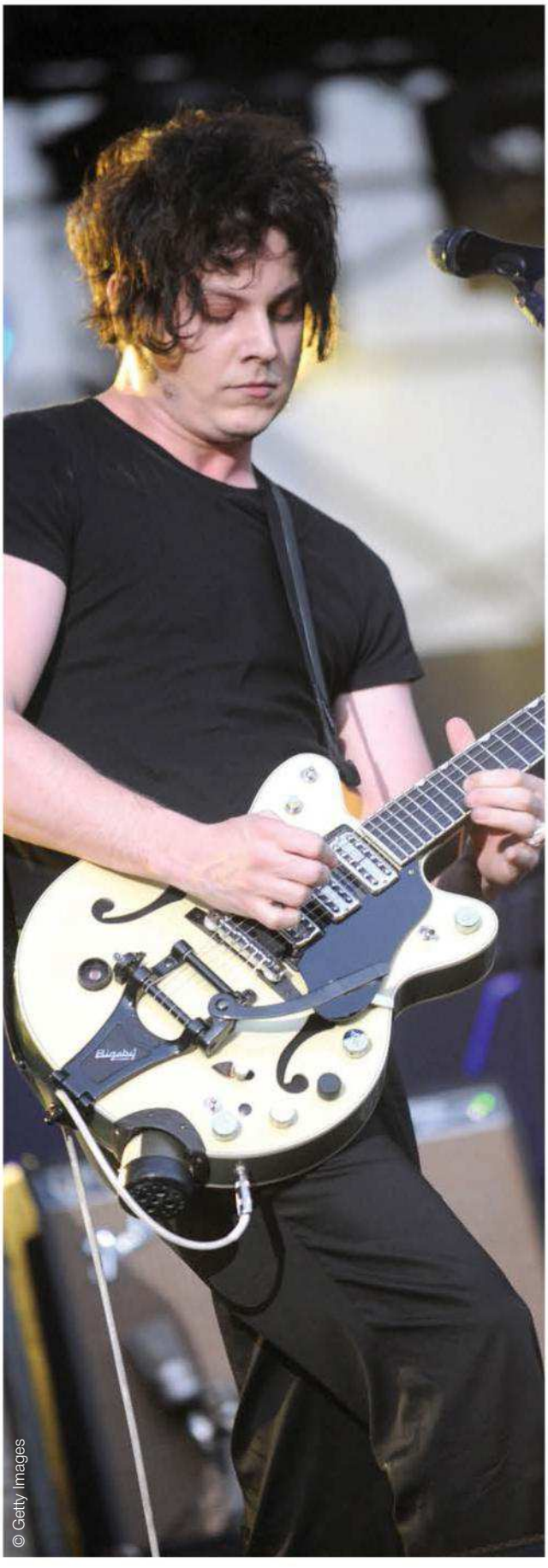
The company was obviously quite pleased with the new units, and presented dealers and customers with a brochure entirely dedicated to these components. Referred to as "electronic guitar heads" in Gretsch parlance, the Hilo'Trons were touted as being 'Full Hi-Fidelity,' with 'Brilliant Highs,' 'Mellow Lows,'

Previous page **Brian Jones was one of the most notable and photographed users of the Anniversary model in the 60s**

Opposite **Jack White played a Anniversary Jr in The Raconteurs, which had been heavily modified by luthier Randy Parsons**

Below **A series of spec sheets for the Gretsch Anniversary models taken from various catalogues in the 1960s**





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and an 'Extra Lively Response.' What more could you want from a guitar pickup? That same year, both Anniversary models lost their Filter'Tron humbuckers and trestle bracing, and gained these new Gretsch-made single coil units instead.

In hindsight, it's hard to see the move as anything other than a downgrading of the model. Filter'Trons are the king of all Gretsch pickups, and players who prefer single-coils generally rave about the DeArmonds of the 50s. For all that, though, an original Hilo'Tron in good condition, on a guitar that's set up right and playing well, can still sound extremely good through a quality amplifier. They are bright pickups, though, with a little girth and bite in their original form, sure, but not much punching power. These were pretty lightly wound pickups, with resistance readings in the upper 2k ohms to lower or mid 3k ohms range, so they don't have the ability to push a tube amp very hard on their own, but they do retain the clarity and sparkle that were major sonic objectives for Gretsch at the time.

DOWN MARKET

The change to Hilo'Trons demarcates the start of a far less-desirable era of Anniversary production in the eyes of players and collectors today, although the model remained quite popular throughout the early 60s. Likely it was still seen as a great bargain in a genuine Gretsch electric guitar – and a good looking one at that – in an age when most players likely weren't as spec-conscious as we are today. As a result, a '60 Double Anniversary with Hilo'Trons is almost always significantly cheaper on the vintage market than a '59 with Filter'Trons (all else being equal), and the discounting might extend to as much as half the value of the latter. Once again, this makes these potentially good value for the vintage Gretsch fan who digs the Hilo'Tron sound, or for someone with the stomach for modding one to '58/'59 specs.

Later in 1960 Gretsch further confirmed the Anniversary's second-class status by using rosewood fingerboards rather than ebony. Hilo'Trons and rosewood 'boards don't appear to have arrived simultaneously, and you will find some crossover in these changes, but by part way into '61 the new specs seem to have solidified.

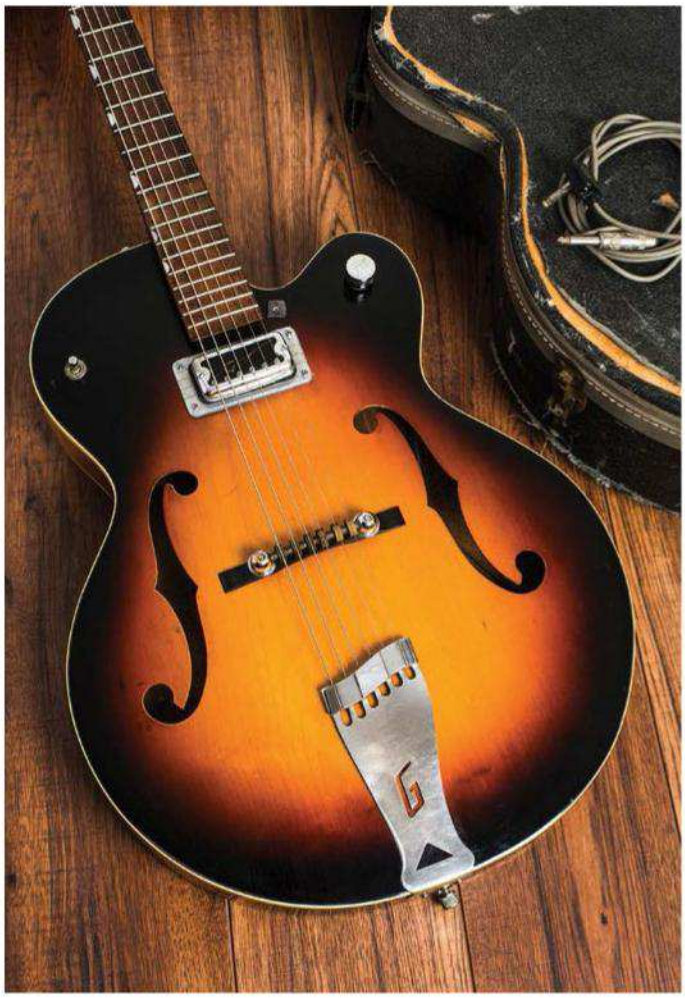
One new development the Anniversary didn't get which the 6120 had received the year before was the 'zero fret', the fret added adjacent the nut in the so-called 'zero' position to enable a low action determined by overall fret height. Lauded as an 'advancement' in some guitar circles at the time, and still a hotly debated specification, the zero fret was seen as a bonus for Gretsch's upmarket models – even though, again, many players and collectors today demarcate the 'pre-zero fret' years of the 50s as the golden age at Gretsch – and apparently the lower-priced Anniversary models weren't deemed worthy of the addition. For those who never got on with a zero-fret, this fact can make the '60 and early '61 Double Anniversary a desirable acquisition, especially if you can find a transitional example that retains the ebony fingerboard.

LIVING STEREO

In 1961 Gretsch inducted the Anniversary model into another ill-conceived club, which already had several other more high-end models as members. Stereo was the watchword in just about any realm of consumer electronics in the late 50s, and if hi-fi systems were all at it, well, many guitar makers also figured stereo must be the way forward for them, too. Gretsch's exalted White Falcon and Country Club models had offered a stereo option since '58, using two more closely-spaced Filter'Tron pickups that had only two rows of three pole pieces under the bass strings in the neck position, and two rows of three under the treble strings in the second pickup nearer the middle position. The output routed one pickup to one amp and the other to a second, and voila, stereo!

It seems, however, that just about the time Gretsch was trying the same trick in '61 with two three-pole Hilo'Trons on the Sunburst model 6111 and Two-Tone 6112, the guitar world et al was catching on to the reality that you didn't necessarily get a better sound with bass and treble strings routed independently. That, and the two amps needed to fully achieve the sound (or single, more complex, more expensive 'stereo amp') were a further pain in the backside besides. After '62 the Stereo Anniversary disappeared from the catalogue.

One thing the Anniversary didn't get in '61, however, was the



Above left **A 1960 Single Anniversary model complete with Hilo'Tron pickup**

Above right **2017's Gretsch G6118T Players Edition Anniversary in eye-catching two-tone Iridium Silver and Azure Metallic**

double-cutaway body shape given the 6120 and other key models. Again, the Anniversary's bargain-rate status probably saved it from that 'advancement' in guitar design. But what might have been seen in the day as lagging behind the trends helped it remain a more 50s-styled model that continues to this day to please fans of the seminal single-cutaway format that graced guitars in the hands of Eddie Cochran, Duane Eddy, and others.

And yet another thing the Anniversary never got: the clunky mute device that high-end models received in '61, along with the arguably rather ugly snap-on pad covering the access hole in the back of the guitar's body. More players removed the pointless, rattling, weight-increasing mute mechanisms from their 6120s, Country Gentlemen, Country Clubs and others than we can begin to count, so it's another plus that the Anniversary never suffered one.

In '63 the Double Anniversary was given a bound fingerboard, an upgrade that made it an even better budget route to full-bore Gretschitude... other than the fact that the bindings on Gretsches this age of any status have likely crumbled by now. Still, it was a sign of respect. Also that year, Gretsch introduced the hip new alternative finish 'Two-Tone Tan' was introduced, with Bamboo Ivory on the top and Jaguar Tan on the back, sides and neck – all of which sound a lot more appealing than if they'd called it 'beige-and-brown'.

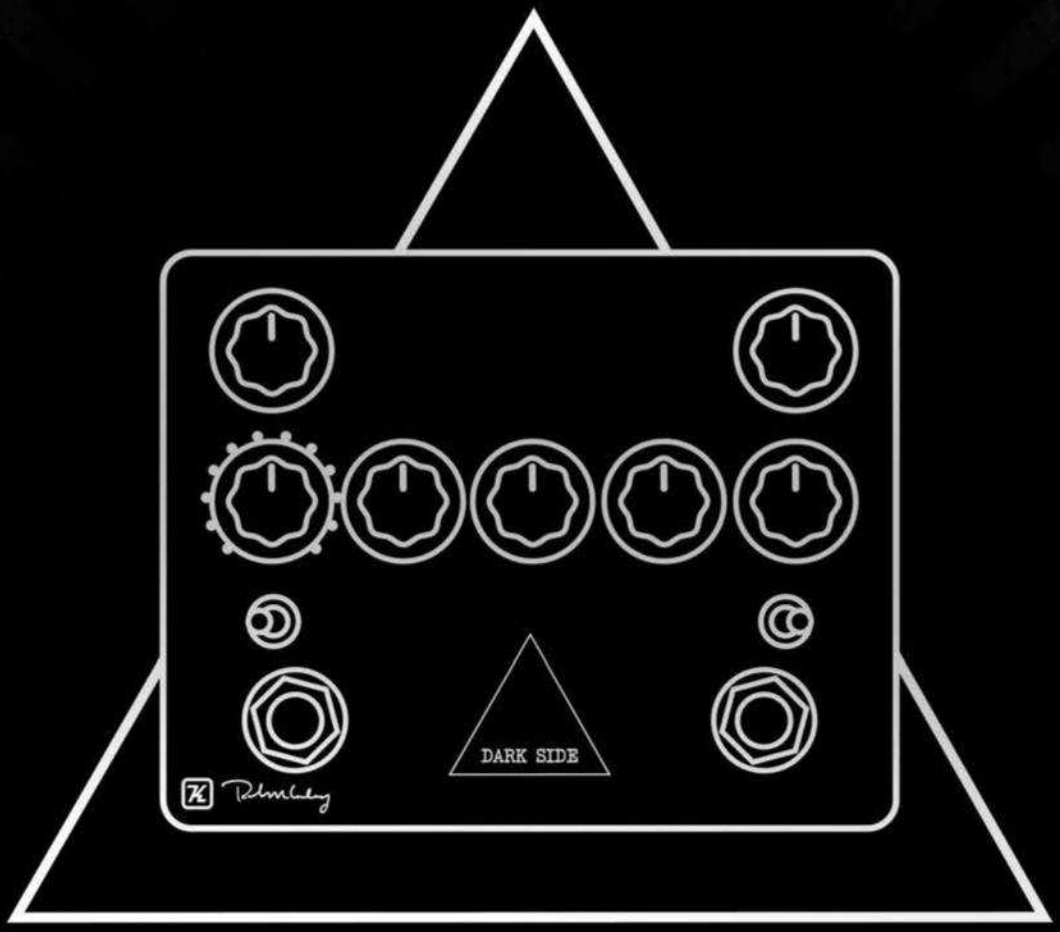
THROUGHOUT THE 'DARK PERIOD' OF 1970 TO 1972, THE DOUBLE ANNIVERSARY SOLDIERED ON

BALDWIN BECKONS

Not much befell the Anniversary models through the mid 60s until Baldwin bought out Gretsch in 1967. Shortly thereafter the Two-Tone (aka Smoke Green) finish option was dropped. The rather pointless Single Anniversary was also unceremoniously deleted during the Baldwin years. The Double Anniversary received the zero fret in '68.

Gretsch itself underwent several upheavals under Baldwin's rein, as the big piano company sought to consolidate production and sales operations during what was becoming a downturn for the guitar market in general. In 1970 Baldwin moved guitar-making operations from the Brooklyn plant where Gretsch guitars had been manufactured for 54 years to an existing Baldwin facility in Booneville, Arkansas. The sales team lingered on in Brooklyn for a couple of years, then shifted briefly to Chicago before settling in with Baldwin's corporate headquarters in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1972. Throughout all of this – widely recognized as a dark period

ALL THAT YOU WANT.



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in Gretsch history – the Double Anniversary soldiered on, until its retirement in 1977.

Gretsch languished through the late 70s and early 80s, occasionally producing some ill-conceived new models, and occasionally manufacturing no new guitars at all. As Baldwin began liquidating other assets in the early-to-mid 80s, Fred Gretsch III saw an opportunity to bring the brand back into the family, and purchased his namesake instrument manufacturer in 1987. Gradually, through careful oversight and a thoughtful roll-out of several classic models and a few reconfigured designs, Gretsch regained its status in the market.

JOINING THE FENDER FAMILY

After shifting production locations and lineups through much of the 80s and 90s, Gretsch penned an agreement in 2002 with the Fender Musical Instrument Corporation that boosted the brand with the strength of FMIC's manufacturing and marketing facilities, while allowing the Gretsch family to retain ownership. In the estimation of many players, this marks a watershed in the history of modern Gretsch guitars, ensuring the steady availability of classic-styled models built – whether in Japan's Terada factory, or in limited run in Fender's USA Custom Shop, or as the budget-friendly Electromatic line made in Korea and China – to a quality that is often judged to be 'better than vintage'.

THERE'S A LOT OF MILEAGE TO BE HAD OUT OF JUST ABOUT ANY VERSION OF THE ANNIVERSARY

A fairly standard Double Anniversary occasionally figured in the early reissue lineup, but during the FMIC-manufactured years we have more often seen Gretsch use the model for an upgraded, player-friendly release that includes desirable features that were never loaded onto originals. In 2003 Gretsch offered the 120th Anniversary G6118T in a two-tone featuring a Bamboo Yellow top and Metallic Bronze back and sides, with Filter'Tron-style pickups made by TV Jones (aka TV Jones Classics) and a Bigsby vibrato. In 2008 the 125th Anniversary rendition took on a Jaguar Tan finish (Bamboo Ivory top and Metallic Gold back) with TV Jones's hotter Power'Tron pickups. Today's Player's Edition Gretsch LTD 135th Anniversary features a two-tone Casino Gold top over Dark Cherry Metallic back and sides, with reissue Filter'Tron pickups. All of these versions also carry the ebony fingerboard that the Anniversary lost circa '61.

Whether it's a vaunted '58 to '59 original, a sensitively modified 60s rendition, or a thoughtfully reconfigured reissue, there's a lot of mileage to be had out of just about any version of the Anniversary, and for many players these still offer a means of achieving classic Gretsch styling and tone for significantly less outlay than the high-end models.

Below **The price tag of the original Gretsch Anniversary model was one of the big draws when it was launched**

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GRETSCH
Bigsby
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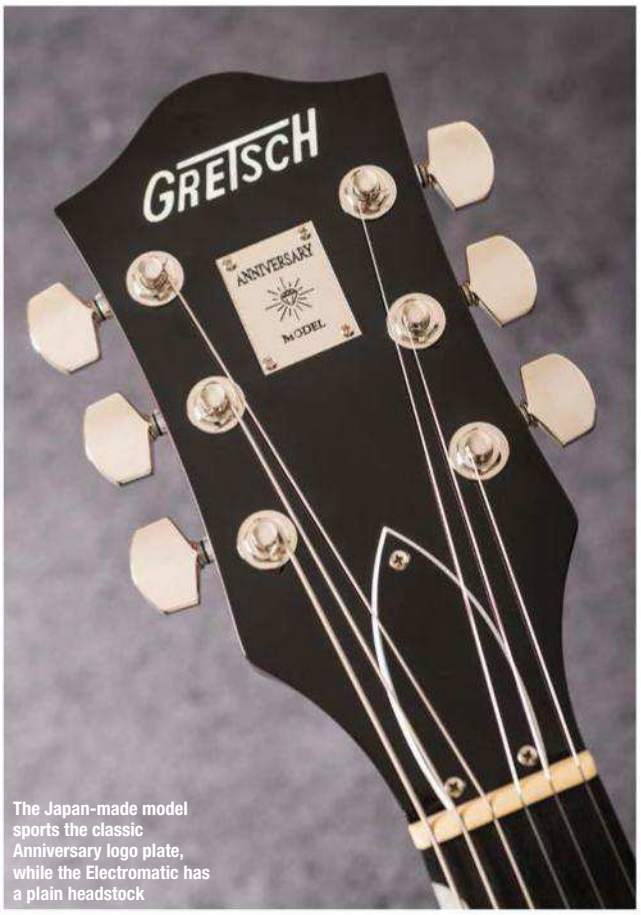
DOUBLE ANNIVERSARIES

We've often raved about Gretsch Electromatics and been consistently wowed by sheer quality of the Players Edition Anniversary, so what happens when they go head to head? Huw Price indulges in a spot of jazzboxing...



The Japan-made model sports the classic Anniversary logo plate, while the Electromatic has a plain headstock

We had the pleasure of getting to grips with one of Gretsch's Japan-made G6118 Anniversary guitars back in April of last year, and to celebrate the company's 135th anniversary, the brand has decided to deck that same guitar out in a lovely gold/cherry combo. However, there's, no point in us reviewing the same model twice, so it's very handy that Gretsch has also revealed 135th Anniversary limited edition Electromatic version. What better opportunity for us to assess just what that extra £1,300 or so is going to get you if you're in the market for a big-bodied Gretsch?

On the surface, the Korean-made G5420 is, like the G6118T, a Bigsby-loaded single-cut with 'neoclassical' thumbnail markers and an identical control layout featuring a master volume at the cutaway combined with individual volume controls and a master tone. Beyond this, however, the guitars are quite different – which is signified by a sizeable difference in price.

G5420TG ELECTROMATIC 135TH ANNIVERSARY LTD

Although ostensibly a mid-priced guitar, the G5420TG has various features that are more commonly associated with high-end Gretsches. We're talking f-holes, headstock and fingerboard binding, and a pinned compressed ebony bridge.

As for finish flatness and colour there's not much between them, but the 5420 has some untidiness around the heel and along the neck extension. It might have benefitted from a few more minutes with a sanding block, but it's far from obvious. It's clear that more prep time has gone into the G6118, and an absence of build up around the heel and neck join indicates that poly finishes are sprayed a bit thinner at the Japanese factory.

The binding colour is different because the Korean factory has sprayed tinted clear coats. It certainly gives the guitar a softer appearance, but it's a matter of taste if you prefer the cleaner white binding lines around the G6118's body. Also note that the Japanese factory uses a vintage correct white outer layer with a thinner back layer of binding on the inside. In contrast the Korean factory does white, black, white.

THE G5420TG HAS FEATURES THAT ARE MORE COMMONLY ASSOCIATED WITH HIGH-END GRETSCHES

All the G5420's hardware is gold-plated, with open-geared tuners, a licensed Bigsby and an Adjust-O-Matic bridge. The 'G' arrow knobs and strap lock buttons provide yet more vintage references.

The headstock has the 1960s shape with a modernised take on the Gretsch logo. The peghead is also sprayed to match the front of the body and the wider frets are properly dressed in a compressed ebony fingerboard that's sprayed and polished to a high gloss.

The body is made from five-ply maple rather than the vintage spec three-ply used in Japan. Reaching through the f-holes and pinching the top between our fingers, the G5420's

extra thickness is quite apparent. Looking through the F-hole, it can also be seen that the G5420 has a single soundpost joining the top to the back in the area immediately below the bridge.

Lastly, the Korean guitar gets Gretsch's Black Top Filter'Trons with open covers. Note the two screws on the bass side of the pickup rings, which allow you to set pickup angle as well as height.

G6118T-135 ANNIVERSARY LIMITED EDITION

The main points of difference have been mentioned above but the most interesting contrast is the way the G6118 balances modern features with vintage authenticity. The 50s-spec body and trestle bracing coexist with locking tuners, a streamlined control layout and contemporary locking strap buttons.

There are slight structural differences, too – with the neck extension rising clear of the body at the 17th fret rather than the 20th on the Korean model. The neck profiles are similar, but the slightly slimmer and softer shouldered Japanese neck has a sophistication and vintage authenticity that we prefer. What's more, the High Sensitive Filter'Trons look like the real deal, and the elegant plexi pickguard surpasses the Korean version's crude bevel and clunky shape.

With their slightly darker and softer tone, the Black Tops share some characteristics with vintage Filter'Trons, but despite their extra brightness, the High Sensitives get closer to the clarity, dynamics, crisp definition and depth of tone of the old ones. At higher volumes, these guitars prove surprisingly feedback-resistant and both sustain slightly longer and more evenly than our 6120 conversion reference.

BOTH GUITARS ARE LIVELY, RESONANT AND RESPONSIVE, BUT THE G6118 IS MUCH SMOOTHER

IN USE

Running through our Rift PR18, there isn't that much in it. Both guitars sound unmistakably Gretsch-like and really couldn't be mistaken for anything else. The Black Top Filter'Trons do a perfectly decent job and while the High Sensitives in the G6118 are brighter, growlier, clearer and twangier, we enjoy playing both sets.

Although we often begin by comparing the unplugged tones, there's a reason we have done things differently this time. Acoustically both guitars are very resonant, lively and responsive. However the G6118 is significantly smoother, deeper and richer in the mids, and consequently doesn't sound as bright. The bridges

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

If you're after a single-cut Bigsby equipped hollowbody on a budget, then affordable alternatives include the **Epiphone Emperor Swingster** (£597), **Peerless Tonemaster Standard** (£744) and **Guild X-175 Manhattan** (£944). If you're looking for a high-end Gretsch alternative with a less bling paintjob, try the **G6118T Players Edition Anniversary** (£2,168) with the same specs in either Lotus Ivory/Charcoal Metallic or Smoke Green (£2,168). If only US-built high-end alternatives will do, the TV Jones-loaded **Collings Statesman LC** (£5,400) is hard to beat

The Japan-made 135th Anniversary model sports a Casino Gold top with Dark Cherry Metallic back and sides

are the determining factor rather than the trestle bracing or the three-ply body, and we know because we swapped them.

This inspires us to try some pickup tweaks, too, and when the Black Tops are raised and the pole screws are adjusted to even up the string balance, the G5420 begins to close the gap on the G6118 and our vintage Gretsch.

The G5420 is ripe for upgrades and most would be very simple to perform as funds allow. Tuner swaps are commonplace, although it wouldn't be necessary in this case. Similarly the licensed Bigsby works fine and looks good, but V-cut Bigsbys are available, along with nicer looking pickguards.

The big f-holes make the tone capacitor easy to access and swap, and a wide choice of replacement pickups and rings are available for you to install more highly regarded Filter'Trons, Filter'Tron-sized P-90s, Dynasonics and more besides.

Nothing feasible can be done about the absence of trestle bracing, although a competent luthier could probably install a couple of spruce struts under the bracing by going through the bridge pickup hole. You'll have to live with the five-ply body, but if you play loud and use a lot of amp gain, the less willing resonance of the Korean construction may work in its favour.

If you only perform one upgrade, we'd suggest installing a bar bridge because of its transformative effect on acoustic and electric tone. Make no mistake, the G6118 is better built and nicer to play, but the stock G5420 is a worthy guitar that has the potential to look and sound even better after a few tweaks and well considered upgrades.

The Electromatic Anniversary flips the colour palette with a gold back and sides and Dark Cherry top

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

The Adjust-O-Matic bridge on the Electromatic is primed for an upgrade to a Rocking Bar

KEY FEATURES

Gretsch G5420TG Electromatic 135th Anniversary Ltd

- **DESCRIPTION** 6-string hollowbody electric guitar. Made in Korea
- **PRICE** £891
- **BUILD** 5-ply maple body with trestle bracing, set maple neck with medium U profile, 12" radius compressed ebony fingerboard with pearloid thumbnail markers and 22 jumbo frets
- **HARDWARE** Licensed Bigsby, pinned rocking Adjust-O-Matic bridge with compressed ebony base, open gear tuners, 'G' arrow knobs
- **ELECTRICS** Black Top Filter'Tron pickups, master volume, master tone, individual volume controls, three-way selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 625mm/24.6"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43.52mm at nut, 52.92mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20mm at first fret, 22.5mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.7mm at nut, 53.3mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.39kg/7.5lbs
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISHES** Dark Cherry Metallic/Casino Gold
- **CONTACT** Gretsch Guitars EMEA 01342 331700 **www.gretschguitars.com**

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Authentic but affordable Gretsch tone
+ Rock solid tuning
+ Quality pearl thumbnail markers

– Minor finish imperfections
– The bridge choice compromises the tone somewhat

Gretsch looks, vibe and most of the tone at a decent price, but a few tweaks and upgrades could turn this into a pro-quality guitar

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Gretsch G6118T-135 Anniversary Limited Edition

- **DESCRIPTION** 6-string hollowbody electric guitar. Made in Japan
- **PRICE** £2,259 (inc case)
- **BUILD** 3-ply maple body with trestle bracing, set maple neck with medium U profile, 12" radius ebony fingerboard with pearloid thumbnail markers and 22 jumbo frets
- **HARDWARE** V-cut string through Bigsby, pinned Rocking Bar bridge with rosewood base, Gotoh locking tuners, 'G' arrow knobs
- **ELECTRICS** High Sensitive Filter'Tron pickups, master volume, master tone, individual volume controls, three-way selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 625mm/24.6"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43.36mm at nut, 52.6mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20mm at first fret, 22.5mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.6mm at nut, 53.2mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.54kg/7.8lbs
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISHES** Casino Gold/Dark Cherry Metallic

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Classic Gretsch tone, but with a modern twist
+ Again, excellent tuning stability
+ Thin, responsive top
+ Impressive sustain

– The thumbnails markers don't look very high-end

A blend of classic and modern Gretsch features designed for the modern player who appreciates vintage tone and looks

9/10

The Guitar Magazine COMPETITION WORTH £849!

WIN A Fender Hot Rod Deluxe IV combo

TERMS & CONDITIONS

The closing date is **12.00AM GMT 20 JULY 2018**. The editor's decision is final. By entering *The Guitar Magazine* competitions, you are agreeing to receive details of future promotions from Anthem Publishing Limited and related third parties.

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The Hot Rod Deluxe is an institution – for two decades, Fender's workhorse has been a fixture pubs, clubs, practice rooms and jam rooms the world over, and its versatility and fantastic tones have seen guitar players big and small come to rely on its charms for their live sound. Now, thanks to our friends at Fender, we're giving one lucky reader of *The Guitar Magazine* the chance to win one of the brand new Hot Rod Deluxe IV amplifiers to make themself heard in any scenario.

How do you improve on a legend? That's the lofty task that Fender set itself when it came to overhauling the Hot Rod Deluxe for its fourth iteration, but the folks at Fender's Ensenada factory know what they're doing, and the result is a fantastic amp that offers more of what guitar players have come to depend on from the Hot Rod series. You get the two classic channels (with 'More Drive' option on the drive channel), 40 watts of valve power, and a single 12-inch Celestion speaker that you'd expect, but under the hood things have been tweaked to offer an improved playing experience.

The preamp circuitry has been revoiced to improve note definition, so your tone stays articulate and clear no matter how hard you push it, and to give a smoother distortion character overall. When it comes to ambience, the built-in spring reverb has also been enhanced to ensure that you get that classic and much sought-after Fender reverb sound at any volume. On the outside, the Deluxe's new, lightweight pine cabinet is covered in classic black vinyl, but the iconic silver grille cloth has been lightly aged to give things a more retro look.

Our own Huw Price was suitably impressed when we reviewed the amp last year, stating that, "The Deluxe's midrange characteristics and smoother drive come closer to the tone and feel of some of the high-priced and hand-made amps you might find in premium guitar shops." For more information about the new Hot Rod range, visit **www.fender.com**, and to be in with a chance of winning a Hot Rod Deluxe IV for yourself, simply answer the question below and visit the following link:

theguitarmagazine.com/comps/hotrod

Q Which of these models is NOT a Fender amplifier?

A Bandmaster **B** Bassman **C** Jazz Chorus

Closing date 12:00am GMT on 20 July 2018

SOME MUSICAL BREAKTHROUGHS HAPPEN IN STUDIOS. SOME IN GARAGES.

And some in forests.

ON A DUSTY ROAD OUTSIDE YAOUNDÉ, CAMEROON, YOU CAN PEER INTO THE AFRICAN FOREST AND SEE SOMETHING TOTALLY OUT OF PLACE: VILLAGERS PLANTING EBONY SAPLINGS. ALL SUPPORTED BY A GUITAR MANUFACTURER FROM EL CAJON, CALIFORNIA. DESPITE THE FACT THAT EBONY HAS BEEN USED IN GUITAR AND VIOLIN FINGERBOARDS FOR CENTURIES, THE MUSIC INDUSTRY HAD DONE VERY LITTLE TO REPLANT IT. SINCE WE HAVE NO DESIRE TO EVER MAKE GUITARS WITHOUT EBONY, WE TEAMED UP WITH SOME OF THE WORLD'S BEST RESEARCHERS AND FORESTERS TO STUDY HOW TO REPLANT IT ON A LARGE SCALE. NOW, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY, WE'RE PLANTING, GROWING, AND HARVESTING EBONY SUSTAINABLY. ONE LOOK INTO THAT FOREST IN CAMEROON REVEALS SOMETHING ELSE SPROUTING: HOPE. NOT JUST FOR EBONY, BUT FOR THE FUTURE OF TONEWOODS WORLDWIDE. WATCH THE WHOLE STORY *at taylorguitars.com/ebonyproject.*

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COLLECTION

GETTING CLOSER

Three albums in, a packed touring schedule and a song gracing a big-budget mobile phone advert took Kill It Kid to the masses. But at the height of their success, singer-songwriters Chris Turpin and Stephanie Jean dissolved the band and formed Ida Mae, a rootsy Americana duo. With no record deal to begin with, a collection of beautiful gear and a treasure trove of songs was all they had. And then, as Chris tells Sam Atkins, the real fun began...

Photography Joseph Branston

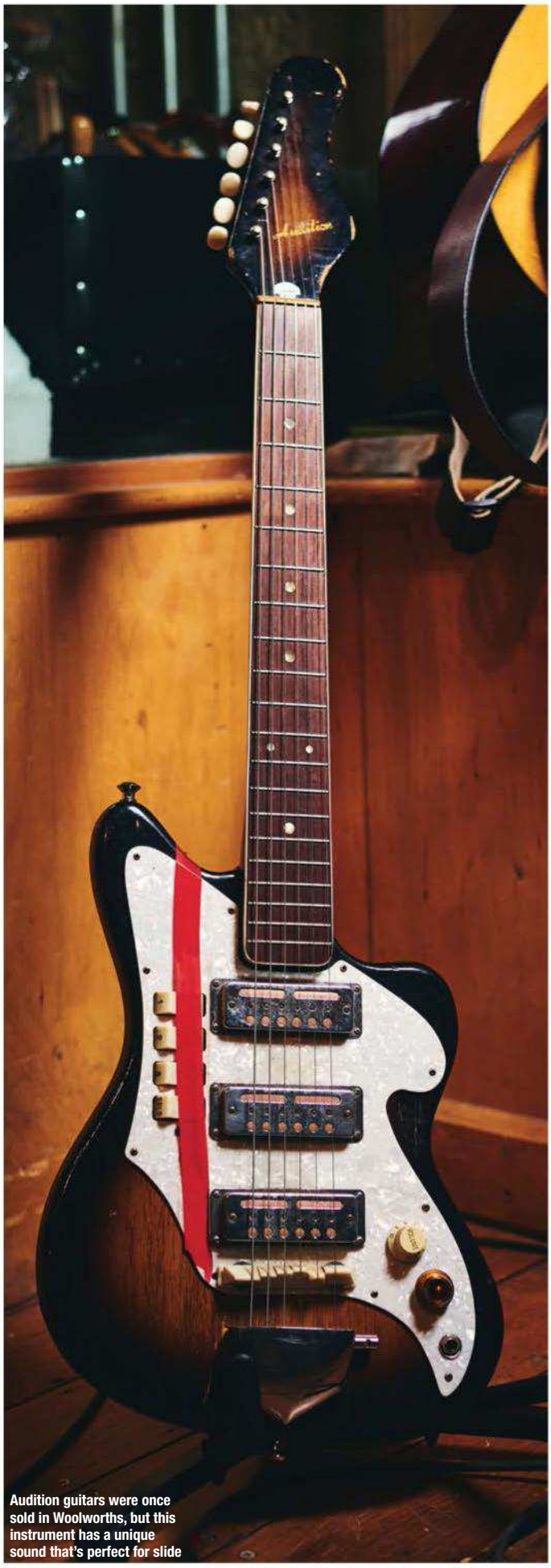
When acclaimed producer and multi-instrumentalist Ethan Johns contacted Ida Mae's management team they may not have expected it, but they were ready for it.

"So we got this call and the message was, 'Ethan wants to meet you at this time, on this day and at this address'. We ended up going to his house – in the wilds of Somerset, in a log cabin in the back of his garden – and talking about music all day," Chris Turpin recalls. "Halfway through the day, the conversation changed and we thought, 'Hold on, does he want to do our record?' He ended up asking us to stay for dinner and then I just thought, 'I'm going to call out the elephant in the room' and I said, 'We'd love for you to do our record' and he said, 'Fantastic, I'd love to record it'. We're still not sure how it all happened!"

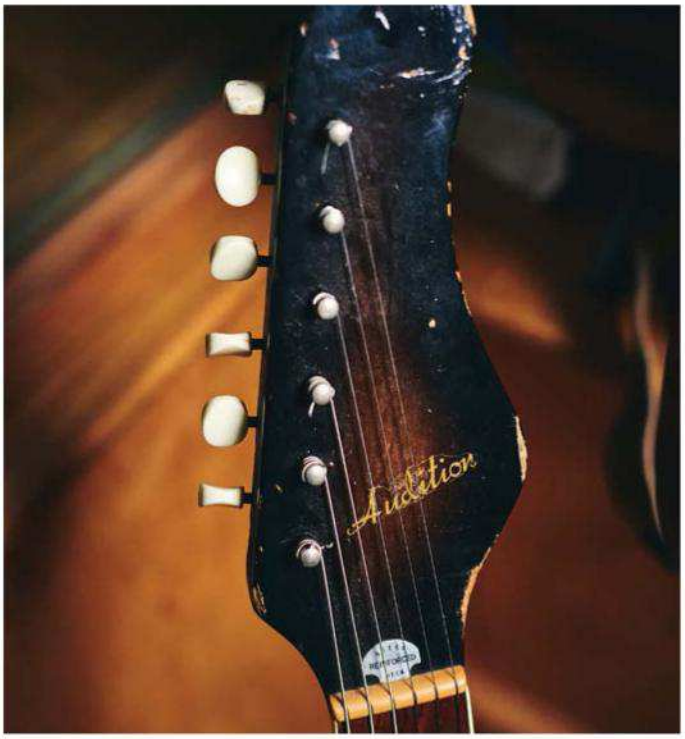
STATE OF FLUX

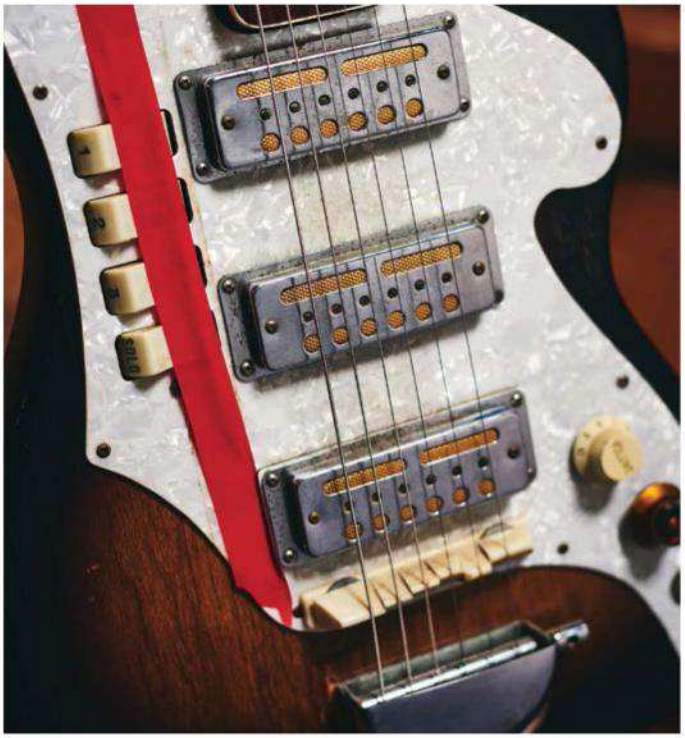
The music industry is, and will always be, in a state of constant flux. What doesn't change is the artist devoting all of their waking hours trying to make their music reach an audience. No longer can emerging bands, or even those who are more established, rely on album sales alone. Touring is the money maker but also a money pit. In the 21st century, having a song used in commercials can be the answer.

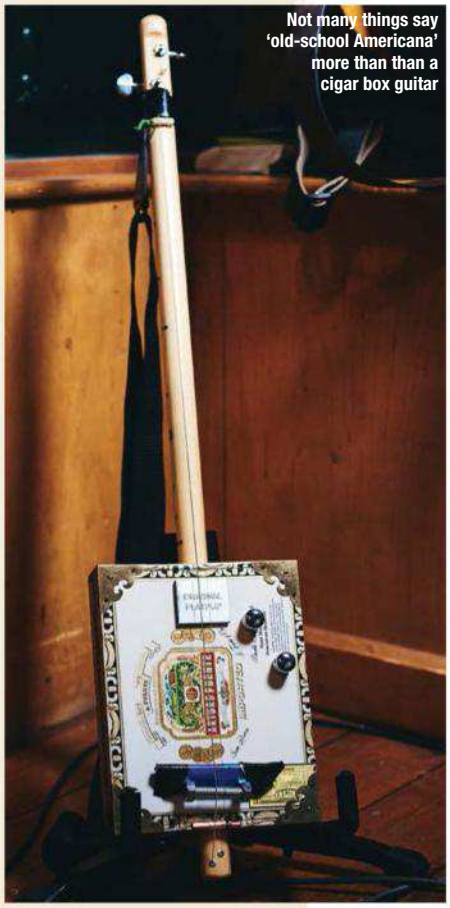
When advertising executives recognised the unique and raw sound of the hard-rocking British blues band Kill It Kid and used one of their songs on a Samsung TV advert, it propelled husband and wife, Chris Turpin and Stephanie Jean, into a world that didn't seem natural to them.



Audition guitars were once sold in Woolworths, but this instrument has a unique sound that's perfect for slide






Not many things say 'old-school Americana' more than than a cigar box guitar

After dissolving that band following three albums, critical acclaim and touring most parts of the world, establishing Ida Mae was Chris and Stephanie's way of grounding themselves back into writing and producing, "sincere and honest music". Compromises had been made in the past but as Chris settles into a very long chat with us he states firmly, "No more compromises".

"I'd got to the three-album mark on Kill It Kid and I really needed to change and shift up creatively. Me and Steph had got married and we both wanted to create an album that was as good as anything we'd ever done. Ida Mae started as a very simple, acoustic guitar-based, two voices, Americana and British blues songwriting outfit.

"Being in a band together and being married is bizarre to some people but to be honest it's what we've always done. It comes as second nature to us and we're so in tune we tend to agree 95 per cent of the time. We were talking about the artwork for the album and the designer spoke to each of us separately and went through this huge Pinterest mood board with us. We ended up picking out the same three pictures. It's quite good as Steph is really logistical and I tend to focus on the songwriting a little more so we pick up the slack with and for each other."

"We co-wrote about 100 songs before getting signed to Universal Music and working with lots of different producers,

> "IDA MAE STARTED AS A VERY SIMPLE, ACOUSTIC GUITAR-BASED, AMERICANA OUTFIT"

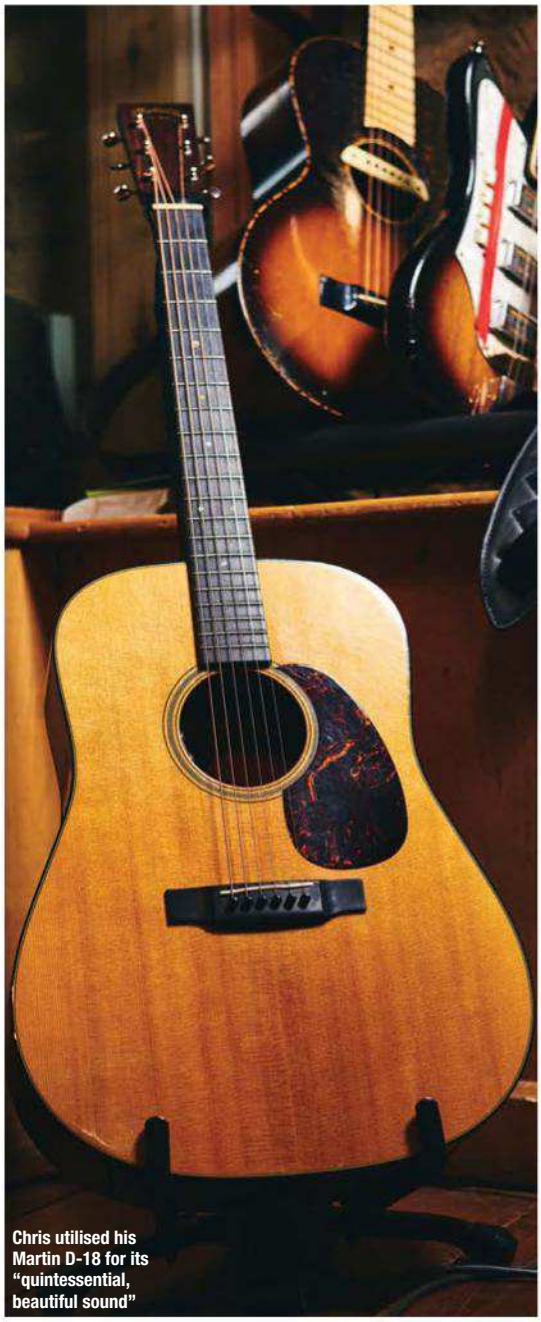
No. 1 songwriters, huge pop producers that work with people like George Ezra, Ed Sheeran, Kings Of Leon and basically we went around the houses, commercially, that didn't feel right to us. We then signed to Sire Records and Warner Brothers and worked with our hero, Ethan Johns, finally completing our album in March."

THE SPICE OF LIFE

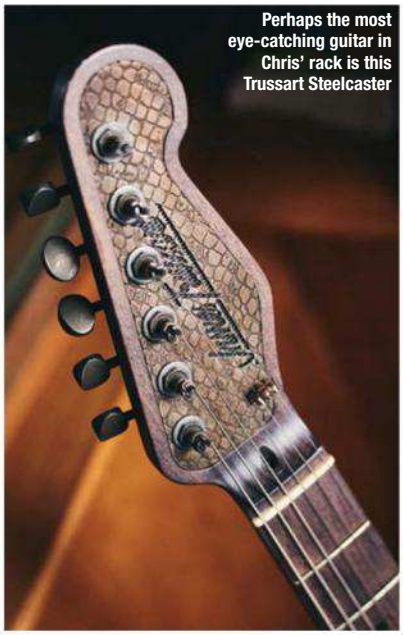
A multi-instrumentalist, producer, engineer, mixer and songwriter, Johns has worked with artists as diverse and legendary as Paul McCartney, Tom Jones, Kings Of Leon, Ryan Adams, The Kaiser Chiefs and Crosby, Stills and Nash. The combination of his A-list CV and the unique sound of the records he produces earned him his aforementioned hero status and meant that when he offered musical insight, the pair were more than receptive.

But if working with a producer of Johns' calibre wasn't inspiring enough for the duo, then the studio he chose for the recording sessions can't have hurt either.

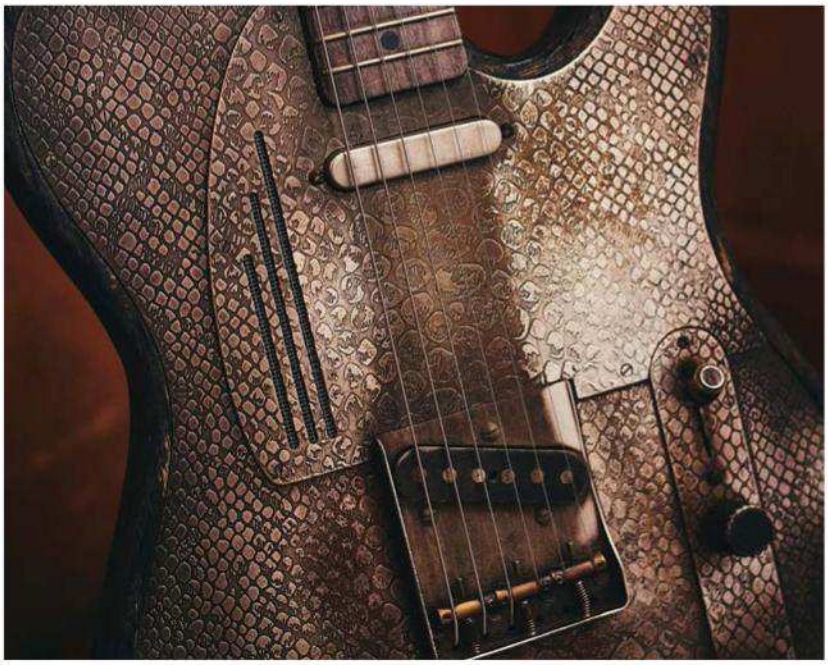
Less than eight miles from the historic city of Bath sits a rural idyll of old mills, in varying states of distress, well-kept waterways, and a recording studio. Not just any common or garden studio but, what has become



Chris utilised his Martin D-18 for its "quintessential, beautiful sound"



Perhaps the most eye-catching guitar in Chris' rack is this Trussart Steelcaster



affectionately known in musical circles as, the 'legendary' Real World Studios. Real World was set up by Peter Gabriel in 1986, and has since welcomed artists such as Van Morrison, Beyoncé, Coldplay, Mumford & Sons, Paolo Nutini, Robert Plant, The Vamps, Paloma Faith, Rag 'N' Bone Man, Tom Jones, New Order, Kasabian, Laura Marling, Pixies… and now Ida Mae.

The setting provided the perfect environment for Chris, Steph and Ethan to get in tune with the rootsy, organic sound the album needed and deserved. Chris' favoured vintage guitars were always close at hand, but it wasn't all old-school during the sessions.

"We used quite a lot of drum machines with the resonator – a 1930s guitar with 1980s equipment," Chris chuckles. "We even had a synthesiser on folk ballads. It's that textural juxtaposition of old and new that gives us a unique sound that Ethan can capture so well."

"I managed to find this dirt cheap 1931 National Duolian resonator on eBay, which is bright red and covered in cowboy decals from the 1940s. We used that guitar a lot alongside my Martin D-18, which is this quintessential, beautiful sound that only a Martin can do. I also used a little Regal-made 1920s Parlour guitar. But again we wanted to screw around with that and we ended up amping that up on one of the songs, which makes a really interesting sound."

> "WE USED QUITE A LOT OF DRUM MACHINES WITH MY 1930S RESONATOR"

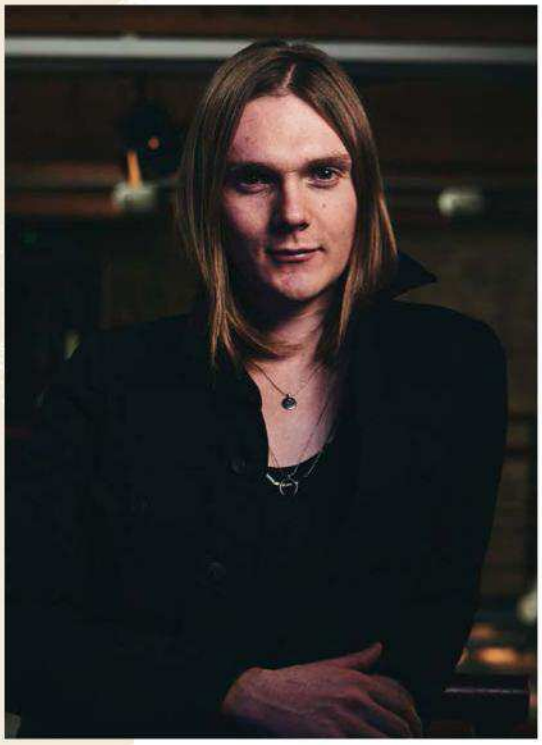
ELECTRIC DREAMS

When it came to plugging in, Chris kept his options limited, with two electrics that are very much at the opposite ends of the price scale.

"I only used two electric guitars," he recalls. "My old Audition guitar, which they used to sell in Woolworths – I picked it up for peanuts and it's got such a unique sound for all the weird slide stuff. It's got a really low output and it's very monophonic hence why I tape all three pickups to stay in one position. My Trussart Steelcaster was also used… I don't need to say how amazing that sounds.

"I didn't use any amps over five watts, which is pretty cool. We used my hand-wired Vox AC4, which is just a killer amp. For the first single, *Feel I'm Getting Closer*, which has a killer tone on it, I used a Cornell Plexi 7, which is an amazing amp. I was also lucky to use Ethan's narrow panel tweed Champ, which I've just fallen madly in love with."

The unmistakable sound of National resonators is a key component of the Ida Mae sound



Chris' Regal-made, 1920s parlour acoustic was amped up for the Real World sessions

Throughout the recording of the album, no DIs were used and everything was tracked live to tape. Chris doesn't shy away from embracing pedals, with quite an extensive collection of stompboxes at his disposal.

"Keeley Electronics make some of the best sounding pedals around today. The D&M Drive, Caverns and Monterey pedals are just so usable and featured heavily in the sessions and on my touring pedalboard, too. The Analog Man Sunface is all over our first single as well as an Analog Man Beano Boost and one of the modded Blues Drivers. I've recently got hold of a Hologram Electronics Infinite Jets, with which I did a really outrageous guitar

> "ALL THE OVERDUBS WERE JUST 'BANG BANG BANG' AND THEN MOVE ON. YOU GO WITH THE ENERGY"

solo on a song called *My Girl Is A Heartbreak*. Using the JHS Pedals Crayon gives me that mental, blown out speaker thing – that with the Voodoo Labs Proctavia together is the most disgusting sound I've ever heard, and then I threw in an autowah. A very weird tone!

"In the whole recording process, we didn't get to hear the tracks until mixing. All the overdubs were just 'bang bang bang' and then you move on. With Ethan you go with the energy. None of us really decided what we were going to play – whatever the player plays is the right thing. When you're surrounded by good players that tends to just happen."

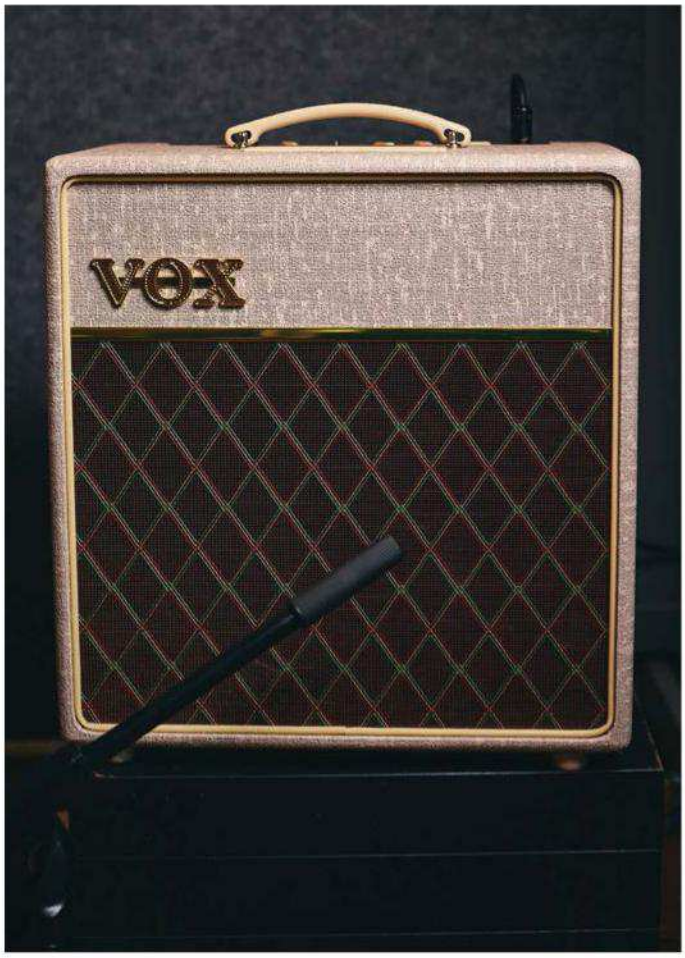
ZAP TEMPO

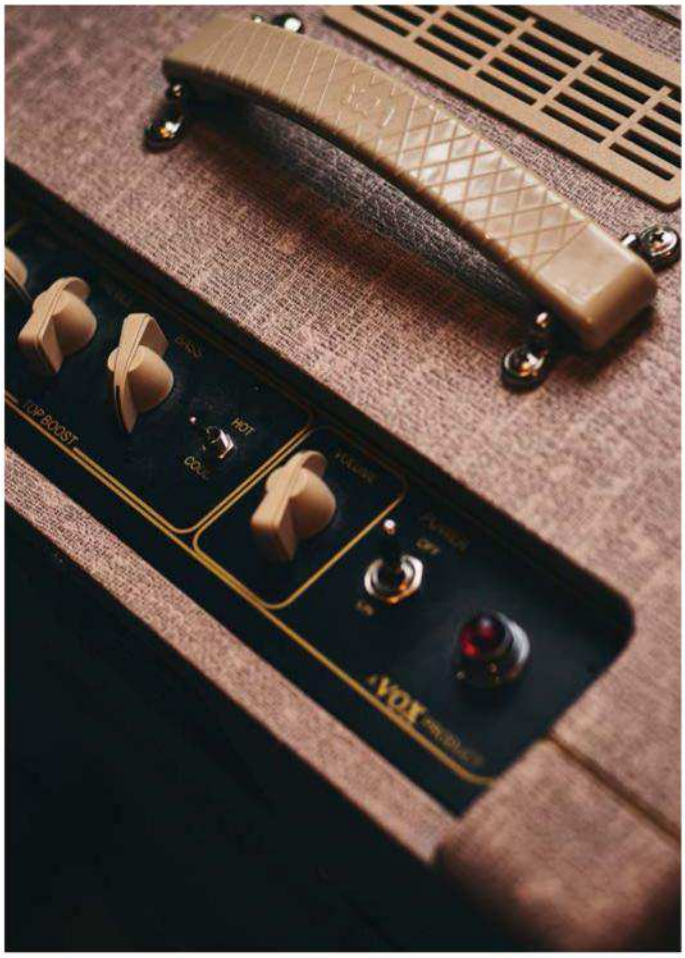
Chris has a very popular Instagram profile (instagram.com/surfburst) and invites people

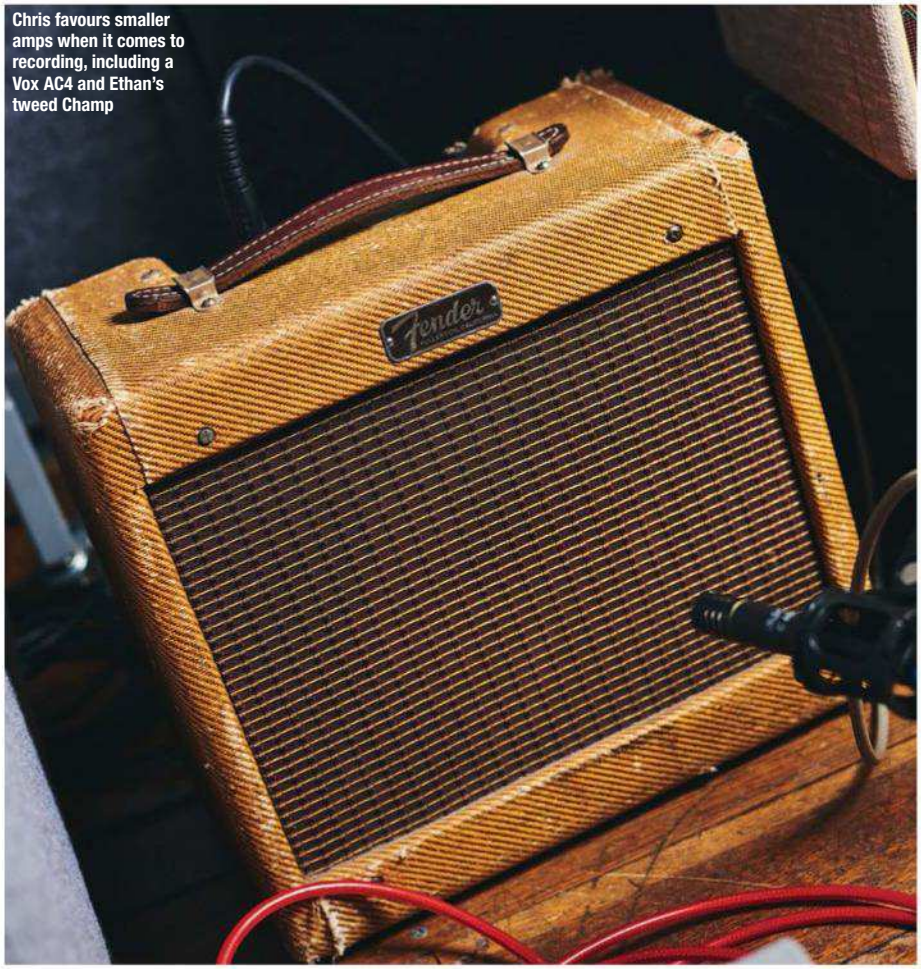
EASTMAN

T64 Antique Goldburst Varnish

CHANGING THE CONVERSATION.







Chris favours smaller amps when it comes to recording, including a Vox AC4 and Ethan's tweed Champ

into his and Steph's world of vintage gear and to be wowed by some very tasty sound clips. One particular person that started to message Chris via the social network was Frank Zappa's son, Dweezil. One thing led to another and Zappa asked if Chris would like to collaborate on something.

"There was this huge 'Zappa Plays Zappa' tour last year and Dweezil was playing the Royal Festival Hall at the Southbank Centre, and he asked me the day before if I'd like to come on and jam with him on *Cosmic Debris*, which is the biggest Frank Zappa blues jam," Chris explains. "I was like, 'I can't do that!'. I ended up doing it though and he was the sweetest, kindest and most down to earth guy you could meet and his guitar playing is in another dimension. Frank Zappa was really supportive of young guitar players and allowed them to sit in with him so Dweezil has inherited that same idea."

The collaboration between the pair didn't end there though, and Chris grabbed the opportunity to ask Dweezil if he'd like to appear on the Ida Mae album.

"So, we've got this rock 'n' roll song on the album and I asked him if he wanted to do a solo on it. I did this one take, a rough and ready Chess Records sort of solo, and then he, from LA, beamed over his take. It's just absolutely wild and an amazing moment. It's a totally different vibe and I think people that listen to it will just love it."

For Chris and Steph, Ida Mae draws a line between their past successes of being in a rock

'n' roll band and focuses on the dynamic of the singer-songwriter team immersed in classic Americana sounds with, of course, the occasional raw British blues moment shining through.

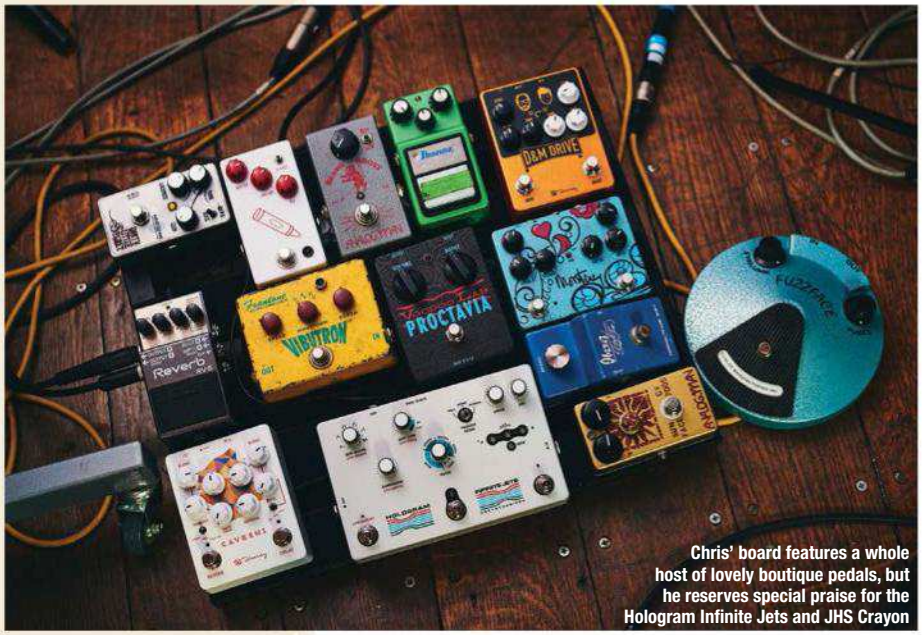
"We're actually in the middle of completing our visas to move out to Nashville in July for, hopefully, three years at least," Chris tells us. "The album release, which will be around autumn time, is going to get a big push in the States so we kind of thought instead of paying rent here in the UK we'll head over to Nashville instead. We both love Nashville and everyone is really friendly and supportive so we thought why not throw ourselves into it. Hopefully, people will buy the record so we can keep doing it!"

On top of releasing a single, recording an album and planning a move to Nashville, Chris and Steph began touring across America from April and will then move on to work their way around Europe, finishing at the start of the summer. The duo hope to be releasing their second single or EP complete with live tracks after the tour has finished, which should bring them up to the album's planned launch.

As our conversation draws to a close it's quite clear that Ida Mae are ready to embrace an entirely new chapter of their longtime musical partnership.

"At the end of the day, it would be very easy for us to go down the commercial route. Do the cheesy girl-boy ballad and have it played on Radio 2 but I'd have to live with that for the rest of my life. I would rather leave behind something that I'm really proud of creatively and artistically. You know what, if it doesn't work out in a few years, I'll still be incredibly proud and wouldn't change any of it. You can't say no to any of this stuff. Music is just an adventure." As Chris said at the top of our chat, no more compromises.

Ida Mae's single *Feel I'm Getting Closer* is available now via Apple Music. For more visit www.idamaemusic.com



Chris' board features a whole host of lovely boutique pedals, but he reserves special praise for the Hologram Infinite Jets and JHS Crayon

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VINTAGE BENCH TEST

OLYMPIC FLAME

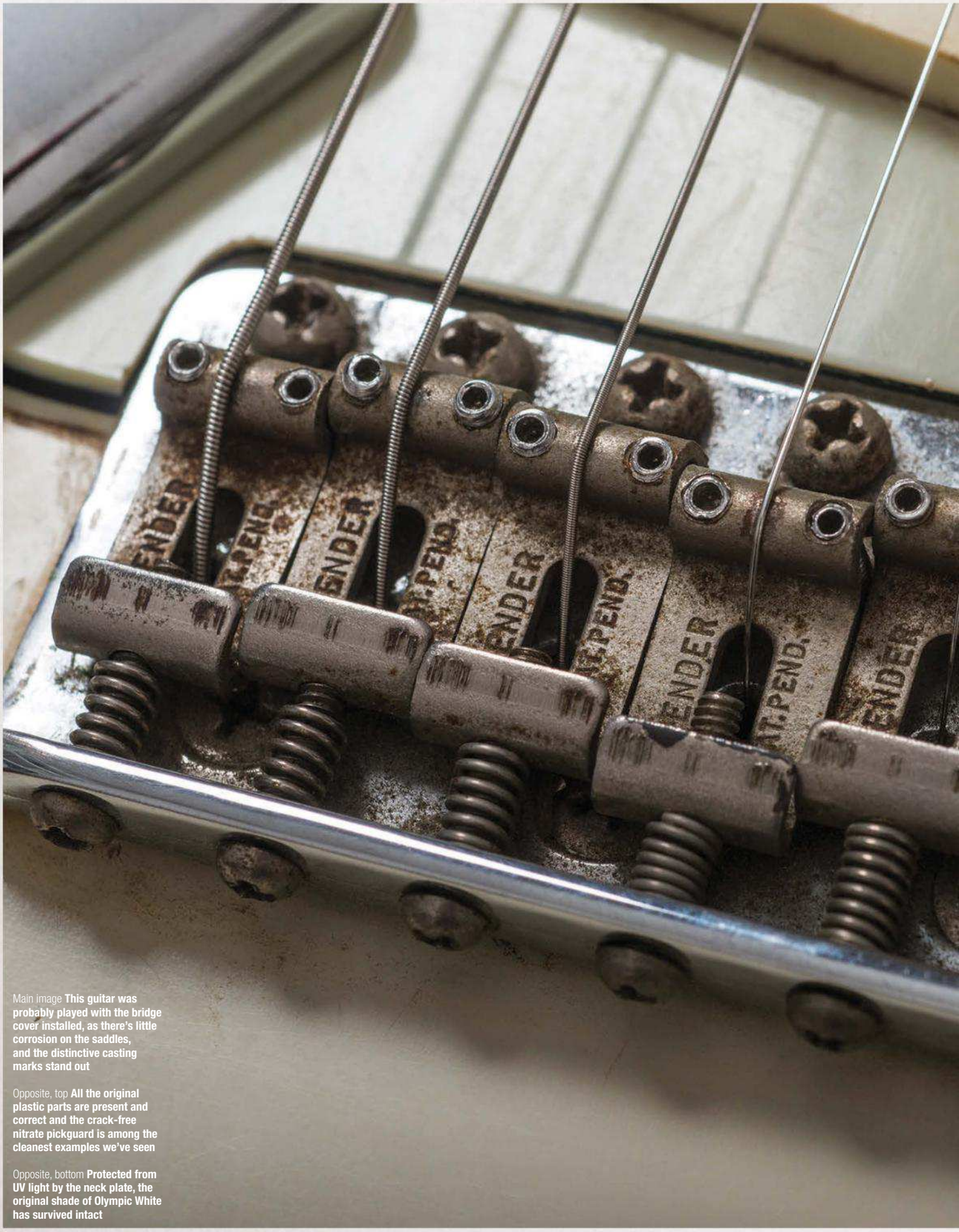
You might think that the idea of unearthing an all-original golden-era Fender that's been kept under a bed or in a closet for decades is pure fantasy. But they are still out there, as Huw Price's encounter with this 1963 Stratocaster proves...

Most of us guitarists have heard tales of unsuspecting people inheriting droolsome vintage instruments by chance, but how often do we get the chance to find out if these hidden gems are actually as good as you'd imagine? You read the story of this particular guitar on p45, but the short version is that since rolling out of the Fender factory in Fullerton in 1963, this Olympic White Strat has had just two owners – it took early retirement in 1968 and has remained with the same family ever since.

As befits a 1963 Stratocaster, the neck has a 'veneer' fingerboard of intensely dark Brazilian rosewood. We notice a hardened drop of something that has run down the side of the neck on the treble side of the neck pocket area and on close examination we think that the fingerboard has been varnished at some point.

There are some minor divots in the usual playing areas, which is quite commonly seen on vintage guitars. We rarely see this on even heavily played 10- or 20-year-old guitars, so we have to wonder if long fingernails were fashionable back in the 60s, or whether nail clippers were harder to come by. Either way, varnishing the 'board was probably done in an attempt to protect the wood, and we have seen it sufficient times to suggest that it was a common 'fix' during the era.

The almost pristine decal has three patent numbers, the single-line Kluson tuners are all in fine working condition and the neck lacquer has aged to a deep honey amber colour. With the factory



Main image **This guitar was probably played with the bridge cover installed, as there's little corrosion on the saddles, and the distinctive casting marks stand out**

Opposite, top **All the original plastic parts are present and correct and the crack-free nitrate pickguard is among the cleanest examples we've seen**

Opposite, bottom **Protected from UV light by the neck plate, the original shade of Olympic White has survived intact**

frets still in place, it's interesting to note that the tang slots were sawn to almost the full depth of the rosewood. It's no wonder that after a couple of refrets, so many veneer-'board Strats of this era ended up with slots cut deeper into the maple, with the fingerboard itself being sanded in the process.

STRAT NECKS GOT SKINNY IN THE EARLY '60S, BUT BY 1963 THEY HAD PUT ON WEIGHT

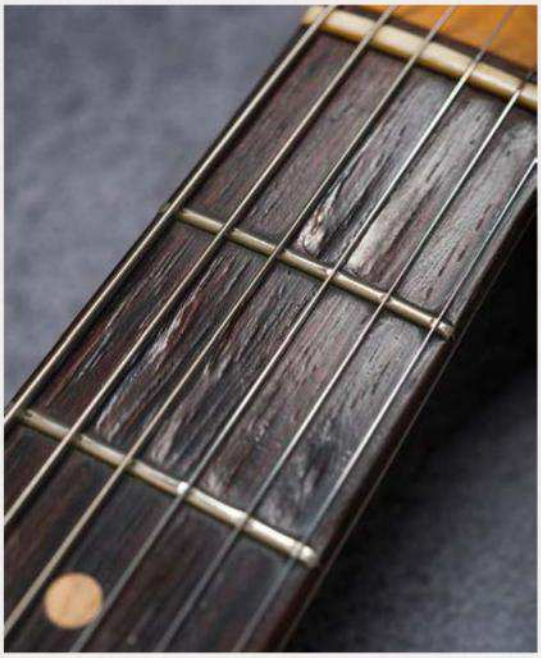
Strat necks got really skinny during the early 1960s, but by 1963 they were beginning to put on a little weight, and we think they are all the better for it. This one's a wonderful example with subtle flames, starting out fairly slim then gradually filling out before acquiring real heft from the seventh fret onwards. Although there is some play wear, the lacquer remains intact on the back of the neck. It's thinned somewhat and slightly paler in colour, with only one faintly grey area where the wood shows signs of oxidisation.

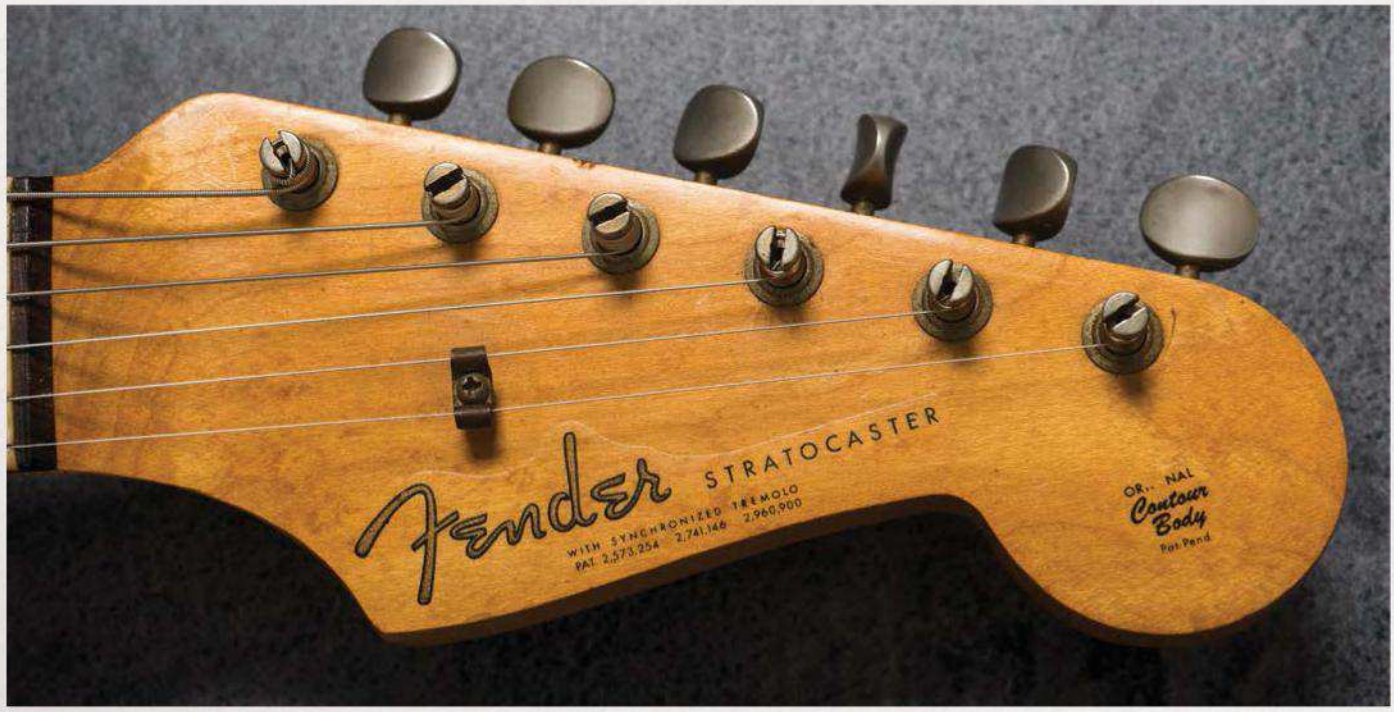
The alder body is in similarly fine condition, with a few dents and chips acquired during its short but intense gigging life. It looks like a cherished but un-pampered five-year-old guitar – which is essentially what it is.

KEY FEATURES

1963 Fender Stratocaster

- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody electric guitar. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Alder body with bolt–on maple neck, rosewood veneer fingerboard, clay dot markers and 21 frets
- **HARDWARE** Kluson single-line tuners, vibrato tailpiece with Fender bent steel 'Patent Pending' saddles
- **ELECTRICS** 3x single coils, master volume, 2x tone, 3-way switch
- **FINISH** Olympic White
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 51mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20mm at first fret, 23.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.5mm at nut, 55.3mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.6kg/7.93lbs





Top left **Subtle flames are visible beneath worn smooth lacquer all along the maple neck**

Top right **The rosewood wear is deepest and most noticeable near the nut, which suggests a lot of open-chord playing**

Bottom **The headstock is near-pristine, with only the tiniest bit of damage on the smaller decal and a touch of corrosion on the string tree**

Fender's Olympic White was actually an acrylic and here it appears to be sprayed over a Desert Sand basecoat.

Fender usually sprayed nitro clear coats over the top and as the nitro aged, Olympic White Fenders turned creamy yellow. Those that retain their whiteness are the instruments that weren't oversprayed with nitro, and although this example hasn't yellowed to a significant degree, it's far whiter under the pickguard. We think it's clear nitro over acrylic, and that keeping it hidden away from sunlight for over five decades has surely helped preserve the original colour, and there's no checking.

Although it spent many years without any regular care and maintenance, the Strat arrives with bridge parts that are almost as clean as they were when they left the factory. The original bridge cover is still with the guitar, and it probably remained fitted to the bridge when the guitar was used. Up close, we can see some minor pitting on the chrome-plated cover where a player's hand once rested.

> ALTHOUGH THERE'S SOME PLAY WEAR, THE LACQUER REMAINS INTACT ON THE BACK OF THE NECK

We remove the neck to adjust relief before testing – probably for the first time judging by the pristine screws. A factory fitted shim is revealed, along with a neck date stamp reading May '63. The green celluloid pickguard is indisputably one of the best–preserved examples we have seen, with no cracks and barely any shrinkage. While the neck is off, we take the opportunity to peek underneath.

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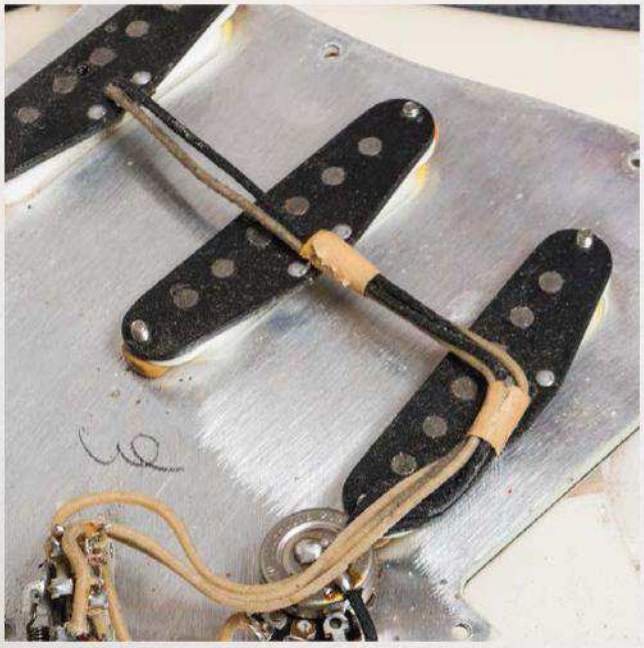

Top left **A spacer nail hole that was used during finishing can be seen adjacent to the neck pocket and all the body routs are unaltered**

Top right **This is what mint Fender factory wiring looks like, complete with the original three-way switch, potentiometers and ceramic 0.1uF tone capacitor**

Bottom right **Few vintage Fenders still have the original masking tape the factory used to bind the pickup wires**

Bottom left **The aluminium shield plate remains fresh and shiny, with three original black-bottomed pickups that all still have their rubber tube spacers**

Inside, we find a still shiny aluminium shield plate and pristine wiring. All the solder joints are original, the spring claw ground wire goes straight through to the output jack and the pickup wires are still bundled together with the original masking tape.

As expected we see a 0.1uF ceramic tone cap with a bright yellow insulation wire and the three-way switch is still intact. Having stiffened up to the point where it's hard to operate, a few drops of three-in-one oil soon free it up and the Strat's ready for testing.

IN USE

This Strat undermines two fondly held vintage guitar myths – namely that the clean ones weren't much good to begin with, and that even the best ones stop sounding good when they're left unplayed. With strong vibrations apparent all through the body, it's apparent this is a 'live one' and even after half a century of inactivity, it plays very well. The 7.25-inch 'board radius doesn't preclude a low action and it feels fantastic for chord work, but

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1964 Fender Stratocaster s/b
1966 Fender Stratocaster s/b
1969 Fender Stratocaster maple cap s/b
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1963 Fender Jaguar Blonde Gold
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1953 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop
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Opposite **An intact solder joint on the spring claw is a positive sign that the finish may be original, but always check the jack socket, too**

Above right **The spring cover is missing one corner, but all five springs are still fitted to the steel block**

Above left **The guitar retains its red fibreboard shim and the shadow of the paint stick that Fender used to hold the bodies can be seen in the neck pocket**

a touch more fret height would help facilitate string bending and finger vibrato.

The unplugged tone is full and vibrant with impressive sustain, deep lows and an airy gloss in the treble. Through an amp it's one of the clearest sounding vintage Strats we have ever played, but the treble always remains complex and sweet rather than shrill.

The bridge pickup is a revelation, because it's Strat tone at its most springy and vibrant – pure heaven through a Vox. The harmonics are so abundant, it's as if there's a built-in chorus. Over on the middle pickup, the trebles soften and the midrange asserts itself with a hint of quacky resonance. Often neglected even by dedicated Strat players, a middle pickup of this calibre reminds us that they are in many ways the pick of the bunch.

> IT'S ONE OF THE CLEAREST SOUNDING VINTAGE STRATS WE HAVE EVER PLAYED

The neck setting produces the most vocal single notes and the woodiest lows. It's so sweet, expressive and downright pretty it's hard to credit it as the same Strat that dishes up the bridge tones described earlier. Each position – the in-betweeners included – is unusually distinct and you really couldn't ask for more from a vintage Stratocaster.

We have played brighter, fatter, louder and more wiry examples, but this Strat gives you something of everything. We all know what Strats sound like, but few are as complex, refined and nuanced as this. With some wear and flat spots, it is on the cusp of needing a refret and we think doing so would enhance it without negatively impacting its value. In all other regards, you'd struggle to find a better custom colour pre-CBS Strat with such solid provenance.

David Pontin (far left) with his band, The Shape Of Things

SOUL MAN

David Pontin began playing guitar in a band in 1965 when he was 17 years old. Formed in the Gwent valleys by a bunch of friends, they were known as The Shape Of Things and by 1966 they were gigging regularly with David playing mostly rhythm.

At the time David was playing a three-pickup Harmony double cutaway – possibly a H75 – through his Selmer Zodiac Twin combo. Former bandmate Gwyn Roberts remembers it sounded fabulous when he used his fuzzbox. The band changed direction and became The Midnight City Soul Band. There was a personnel shuffle, too, with the lead guitarist moving to saxophone and David combining lead and rhythm guitar duties. The second sax player in the band was at Cardiff University and he knew a cash-strapped fellow student who had a Fender Stratocaster he wanted to sell. According to Gwyn, David was "over the moon" when he bought the guitar for £50 in late summer 1967. By this time the band was gigging regularly, notching up 200 gigs in 1967 alone. Perhaps the high point for David was supporting Status Quo at Abergavenny Town Hall Ballroom on 16 March 1968, shortly after *Pictures Of Matchstick Men* had hit the charts. David met a girl at one of his gigs and when they married in June 1968, he decided to quit the band. Rather than sell his guitar, David stashed it away in its Selmer case and it was variously kept it under the bed or in a cupboard. Even before he fell ill with the brain tumour that would confine him to a wheelchair in 1987, David would only occasionally get his guitar out for a quick play. Gwyn recalls that David was "a very good player with a nice touch that was ideal for soul music". Sadly, David passed away in 2014 and we are very grateful to the Pontin family for letting us feature his guitar.

Special thanks to Steve Pontin and Gwyn Roberts for helping us learn about this wonderful guitar's story.

Why I *Love My...*

BILL WYMAN

& 'THE FLYING PENGE'

The legendary Rolling Stones rhythm king on the home-made bass that he brought back from the dead to provide the bedrock of some of the Stones' earliest recordings

1 I love my…
"It's a home-made bass. I love it because this is the instrument I made from a tattered old instrument with a big ugly body I bought from a jazz musician in 1961 for £8, as I couldn't afford a real bass guitar at the time. It can now be seen in a glass cabinet on the wall at my London restaurant, Sticky Fingers."

2 How I got it…
"The fretboard was tattered and all of the frets rattled... it was unplayable. I turned it upside down and drew a new small body shape, and had it cut out with a friend's fretwork machine. I then took out all of the electrics and replaced them, together with a new Baldwin pickup and flatwound strings."

3 It's special because…
"I removed all of the frets, as they rattled, intending to replace them with new ones – but I never did. I've realised in recent years that it was the first fretless bass ever made – and that I had inadvertently invented the 'fretless bass', as they were not to be made until about five or six years later."

4 It's perfect for…
"Anything slightly bluesy – as it ends up, with a little coaxing, to sound rather like a double-bass if it is played right. I was also able to do slides, which became part of my playing style – something other bass players couldn't do well at the time, owing to the sound of the frets on their instruments."

5 It sounds best with…
"A large speaker set-up! I made a bass cabinet with a 18-inch Goodman speaker to go with it in 1961, and the sound was unbelievable, and I performed with it throughout my early times with the Stones – throughout the London clubs, and Richmond, Twickenham and Windsor gigs – and into the early ballrooms and on all of our TV shows - until September 1963 when I changed to the Framus Star bass."

6 Hear it on…
"The first Stones single *Come On* and *I Want To Be Loved*. It was also used on odd Stones recordings from then on, and during the ***Exile On Main St*** sessions in France and there are photos confirming this. I also used it on the Montreux Jazz Festival concert with Buddy Guy, Junior Wells and Muddy Waters, as you can see on the *Messin' With The Blues* video. I continued to use it on the odd Stones recording on and off until and including the *Black And Blue* album.

"It was named by the Stones piano player and roadie Ian Stewart as 'The Flying Penge', as that's where I was living at the time."

Bill Wyman's Rhythm Kings' new album, *Studio Time*, is out now

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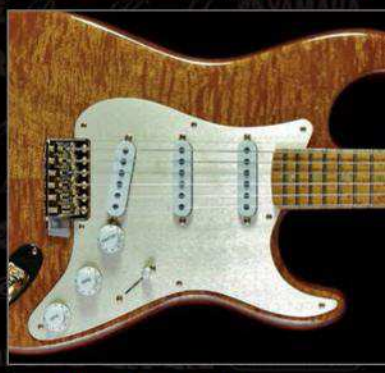

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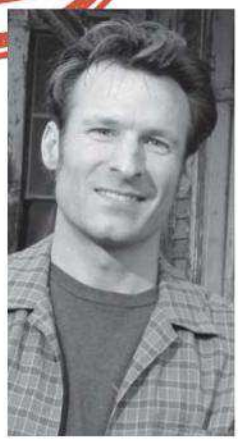


DAVE HUNTER
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of numerous books including *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*

Letters from *America*

SHABAT PUMA

Offering refined takes on classic electric guitar designs, Avi Shabat's instruments are as meticulously conceptualised as they are sought after. Dave Hunter goes in search of a Puma…

If you cycle through a lot of new guitars in the course of your daily grind – either as a player, reviewer, dealer, or collector – it's easy to become jaded about the veracity of new offerings. Which is to say, it can be too easy for the 'oh, it's just another take on the…' to set in. Yet even so, however many 'just anothers' you've played already this year, an artful new creation will still excite and enthral you when you pick it up, run your hand along the back of the neck, and start playing – thus reminding you that, yep, these guitars can be damn cool slabs of wood and wire now and then. Such it is with the Puma from Shabat Guitars. At first glance, it might appear to be 'just another modified Jazzmaster-style guitar'. Get it into your hands, however, and it quickly proclaims how a few intelligent twists on an otherwise familiar form can work toward creating something that's entirely fresh. All of the above, and the fact that this is just one extremely well-built guitar.

> IT PROCLAIMS HOW A FEW TWISTS ON A FAMILIAR FORM CAN WORK TOWARD CREATING SOMETHING FRESH

Like many guitar makers, Avishay Shabat (Avi for short) was bitten by the bug as a kid who played the guitar himself, but couldn't resist taking the things apart to see what made them tick. A native of Israel, Shabat obtained formal training at the Algranti School of Lutherie, then relocated to Los Angeles to apprentice for several notable local repair shops before moving on to build guitars with LSL, and finally setting up in business for himself around 2012. Working with his small team in West Hills, California, Shabat has quickly earned a stellar reputation for a line of traditionally inspired bolt-neck guitars which, in his words, "Conserve the classic guitar formulas that worked and are still

KEY FEATURES

Shabat Puma

- **PRICE** Base price $3,695, including G&G case ($3,895 as reviewed with block inlays and binding, approx £2,769 plus shipping and any duties)
- **BODY** Solid roasted swamp ash
- **NECK** Roasted maple, bolt-on, with 'C' profile
- **FINGERBOARD** Rosewood, compound 9.5"-12" radius, 24.75" scale length
- **FRETS** 22 medium-jumbo, nickel-silver
- **NUT** Bone, hand cut
- **PICKUPS** 2x Lollar Jazzmaster single coils
- **ELECTRONICS** Master volume and tone controls, three-way toggle switch, orange drop tone cap
- **FINISH** Vintage sunburst, in thin nitrocellulose lacquer
- **HARDWARE** Mastery Jazzmaster-style bridge and vibrato, Gotoh Kluson-style tuners
- **STRINGS** D'Addario 0.010"–0.046"
- **CONTACT** shabatguitars.com

working today, but at the same time, perfect the imperfections that accompany many vintage instruments." It's worth noting that Avi also designed and manufactured the first run of Friedman guitars, further consolidating his boutique-market cred.

PUMA KING

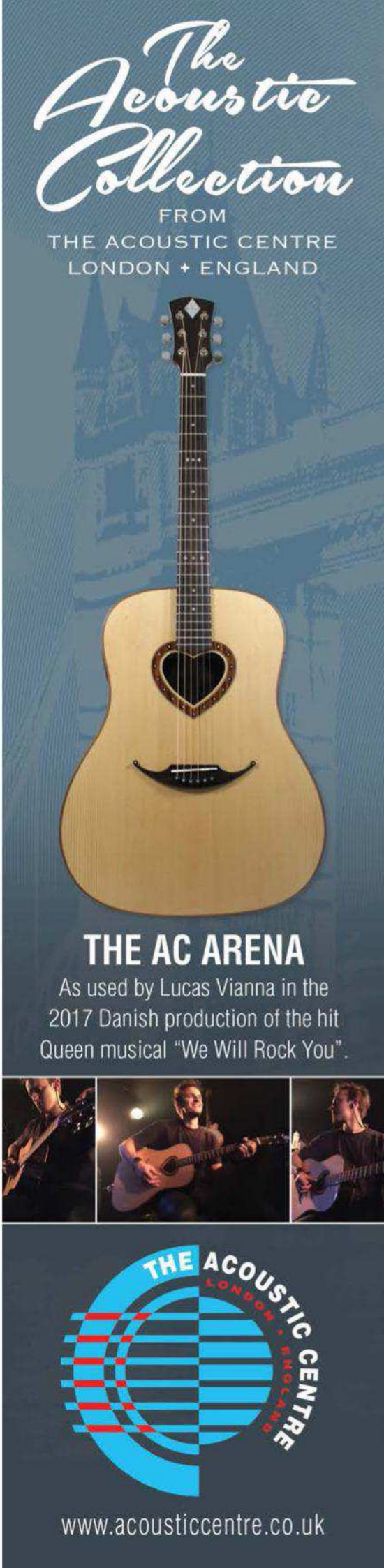
That ethos itself makes a fine introduction to the Puma. Classic, somewhat traditional, and largely familiar-seeming, it nevertheless boasts the kinds of nuance and detail that take 'a simple guitar' over the top into territory that is superbly playable and delightfully toneful. And as with any point at which craft intersects with art, 'it's all in the little things.'

The Puma is a carefully considered take on Fender's offsets

While the Puma bears clear ties to the offset guitar style that has raged forth in popularity in recent years, it's also its own take on the genre: a little more compact of dimensions than the potentially unwieldy Jazzmaster body, it also leans a little more 'asymmetrical-double-cutaway' in a manner that harks somewhat to the hip and stylised Japanese and Italian guitars of the 60s. The body is carved from roasted swamp ash – a tonewood we don't see participating as often as some others in the recent 'baked' phenomenon – and the neck is carved from roasted quartersawn maple, with a bound rosewood fingerboard on top.

Some still call poppycock on the 'roasted' thing, but personally, I'm sold. Nearly every guitar I've played so far that has been made from the stuff has had a little extra magic going on, and this Puma is no different. In the case of this guitar (as in many of its roasted brethren, to be fair), I hear it in a lively, rich ring to the unplugged tone, and lots of wood vibration throughout the structure; simultaneously, I feel it in an 'old-wood texture' that reveals itself as you grip the full, rounded 'C' profile of this tasty neck. Both the back of the neck and the recessed portion of the signature two-tiered headstock reveal the deep caramel of the baked maple, while the swamp ash displays a deep amber toward the centre of the vintage sunburst finish (all in thin nitrocellulose lacquer). The fretwork is immaculate, the binding looks and feels more integral here than it does in some other bolt-necks, and the pearloid blocks are nifty touch.

Another ingredient you don't immediately notice, but which makes its impact once you start playing, and listening, is the scale length. Although he'll make you one at the F-approved 25.5-inch scale, Shabat mixes it up a little by constructing his standard Pumas to 24.75 inches. The change pegs it halfway between the Jazzmaster



The neck is roasted maple with a bound rosewood 'board, plus Shabat's standard two-tiered headstock

and Jaguar scale lengths, making the strings feel a tad more elastic to the touch. And it should pay out in a slightly thicker plugged-in tone, too.

The Mastery company has helped many offset makers up their game with its range of high-end hardware, and they play a big role here in the veracity of the vibrato and bridge on the Puma. The set does nothing to eliminate that offset-style, floating-vibrato 'string ring' that you get from the dead length of string between vibrato and bridge, but that's all part of the character, and plenty of offset fans would be lost without it. What the Mastery does help to cure, though, is the tuning instability, buzz, and lack of sustain you can hear in guitars that are otherwise-equipped, and/or poorly set up. As much as anything, though, the Mastery gear just helps to inspire confidence: "Sure, it's an offset – now go ahead and hit it!"

The Jazzmaster-style pickups are made by Lollar, and read a relatively hot 8.42k ohms in the bridge position and 7.98k ohms in the neck. The master volume and tone controls comprise trusty CTS pots with an orange drop tone cap, and it's all routed through a suitably straightforward three-way toggle switch.

IT WOULD SEEM A SHOO-IN FOR SURF STYLES, OR INDIE-POP, BUT THE PUMA ALSO MAKES A MEAN ROCKER

IN USE

Played through a tweed Deluxe style combo and a Friedman Small Box head and 2x12 cab, the Puma quickly revealed more versatility than you might expect from such a retro-styled guitar. With clean amp settings, it retains that big, bouncy Fender-style 'boing' in the low-E, the crisp attack, and taut fundamental, but delivers it all thickened up with the added girth and looser harmonic fur of the 24.75-inch scale, plus the ringing sizzle of the offset-style hardware.

It would seem a shoo-in for surf styles, of course – and it is – or indie-pop and the like, but the Puma also makes a mean rocker when set to the bridge pickup with the tone control dialed down a little, where it delivers impressively Gibson-like girth and a sincere propensity to grind.

This variation on the theme also provides a quick reminder of why so many players find Jazzmaster pickups special (and these Lollars are good ones): they retain that alnico-pole clarity and sweetness, yet couch it in a wider soundstage that refuses to wimp out. Ultimately, it's cool stuff through and through, and the Puma is simply a great performer by any measure.

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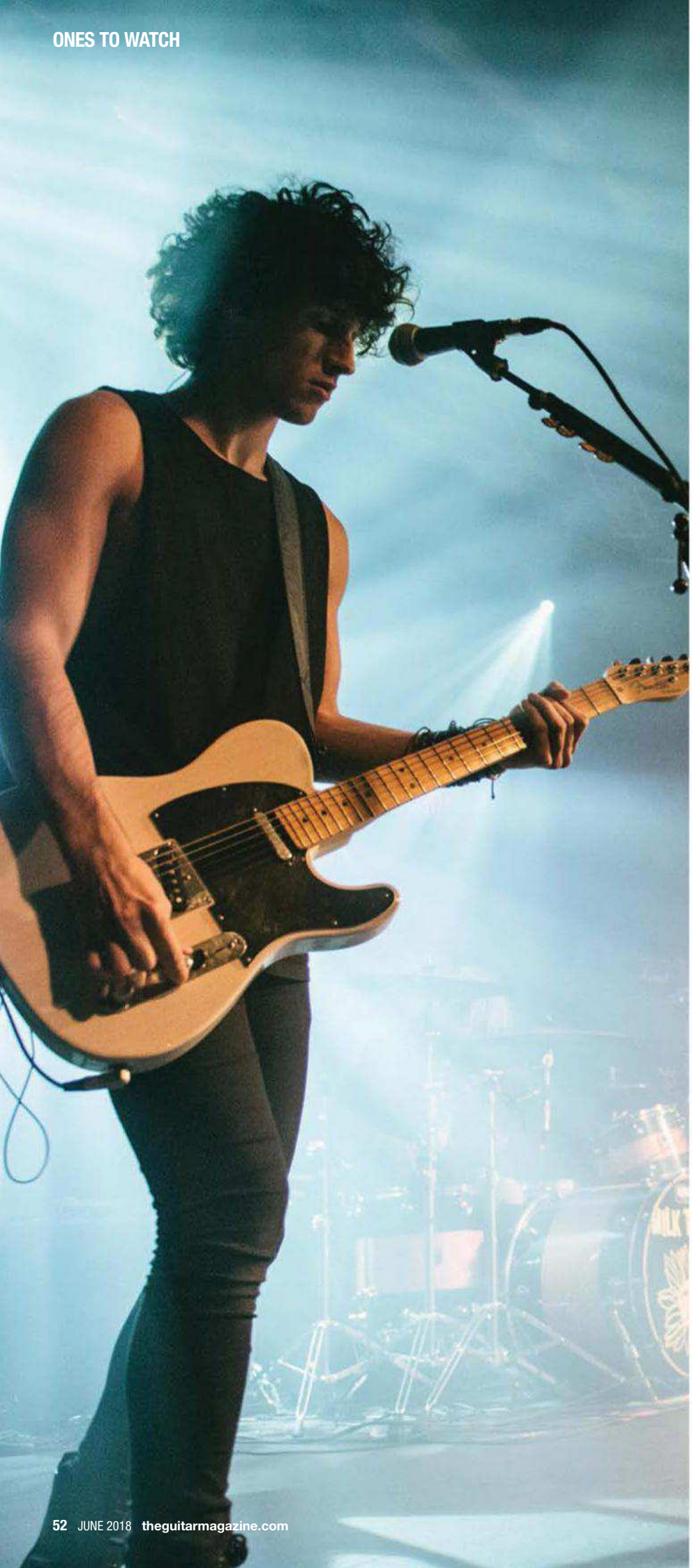

Ones TO Watch

THE FAIM

From a chance encounter with a Grammy-nominated producer to touring with Lower Than Atlantis, it's been a whirlwind beginning for The Faim. Sam Roberts talks to guitarist Michael Bono...

Australia's next major musical idols The Faim appeared on our radar fairly recently following the release of their debut single *Saints Of The Sinners*, co-written with Fallout Boy's Pete Wentz. But it all started with a knock-off S-type...

"My first guitar was a sunburst De Ville. I still have it back at home!" Michael recalls. "I first picked up a guitar when I was around six years old. My Dad had an electric but it was always just a hobby for him. I started playing around with it, having no idea what I was doing, but fell in love. The following year my mum enrolled me into guitar lessons and I basically haven't stopped since."

Michael's love for music is all-consuming, and evident in the wide range of influences he cites on the band's upcoming releases. "Growing up with such a broad music taste between the four of us, the diversity really shows in our songs," the 21-year-old declares. "I loved bands like Green Day, Metallica and Fall Out Boy, compared to the others who grew up listening to bands ranging from U2 and Coldplay to Panic! At The Disco, Frank Sinatra to My Chemical Romance."

His early influences are apparent on the aforementioned *Saints Of The Sinners*, produced by the Grammy Award-nominated producer John Feldmann, who invited the band to his LA studio following a demo he received. "It was such a surreal experience to have worked with John." Michael reflects on working with the multi-platinum selling Feldmann. "I've looked up to his works since a very young age and the bands he's worked with [Blink-182, Biffy Clyro, et al] were such heavy influences on our writing. He really pushed our writing capabilities and has helped us improve as songwriters. It really was a dream come true."

To have your first release produced by someone of Feldmann's stature is no mean feat, but the Perth natives' plethora of newly acquired musical companions doesn't stop there. They were also given the opportunity to work with Blink-182's Mark Hoppus and Pete Wentz, the latter co-writing *Saints Of*....

"We had the chance to hang out with Pete Wentz when writing *Saints Of The Sinners*. He really helped us open our eyes to a new songwriting perspective. Mark was introduced to us in the studio, and we wrote a song with him in the same session. He gave us a really good insight to his writing style and we learnt a lot from it. He's a super nice guy!"

The Faim's rise is not without graft, mind you. Prior to working with multi-million selling artists and producers their songwriting technique required some slight modification. "Breaking away from our original sound was possibly one of the hardest things we've done. It took months of trial and error, writing 30 'half-songs' (intro, verse, chorus), and experimenting with new sounds and styles to reach something that was unique to us."

BRAND NEW

The resulting stylistic change brought with it a reinvention of image and branding, too.

"Before the name change, our band had a very different style. The idea of changing our name came about as we started re-inventing ourselves and our sound when working with John Feldmann," he reflects.

"Our former name, 'Small Town Heroes', felt very 'pop-punk', and we were looking for something that was more suited to our new vision, of having no boundaries when it comes to genre. 'The Faim', meaning hunger in French, captured our urge to succeed in everything that we do. It's also a name with which we can grow as a band, through our sound, image and performance."

Their new approach was evidently not in vain. Signed to BMG, they are currently on tour with Lower Than Atlantis, only to be followed by an even more exhilarating jaunt around their homeland and New Zealand with post-hardcore veterans Sleeping With Sirens.

As is almost customary with world-touring modern rock acts, Bono uses modelling as part of his touring rig, with a Fractal Axe-Fx going into a Matrix power amp.

"WITH THE AXE-FX, YOU CAN GET A GUITAR TONE EXACTLY HOW YOU WANT IT AND MAKE IT SIT NICELY WITH THE REST OF THE BAND"

"I find you can get a guitar tone exactly how you want it to sound and make it sit nicely with the rest of the band," he explains. "It also makes it a lot easier when touring as we DI everything to front of house which means travelling light."

His guitar choice on the other hand is a time-honoured classic, if not a little more rudimentary. "I use a Fender Deluxe Telecaster, it's certainly my guitar of choice at the moment and feels very comfortable to play. I love the tones it produces and the clarity."

Again on the subject of modern technology, the band owe a lot of their fame to YouTube. "When we were first starting out we never considered uploading vlogs to YouTube." Michael admits. "But we wanted to experiment with as we wanted to have a strong social media presence. We found that this was the only way to reach a global audience without spending a load of money on touring."

With a debut album in the pipeline, multi-award-winning producers and musicians in full support and appearances at major UK festivals such as Download and Reading and Leeds already confirmed, The Faim's global audience seems closer than it's ever been.

They do however, still want to maintain that connection with their gig-going devotees. "We're so keen to play for everyone in the UK, there's just so many music lovers here!"

The Faim's singles *Saints Of The Sinners* and *Midland Line* are out now on BMG

Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: A defence of the Silver Sky, memories of Duggie Lock and pickup artists...

LETTER OF THE MONTH

SILVER SKY THINKING

Dear *TGM*, I'm a big John Mayer fan, and so I've been watching the furore online about the release of his PRS signature model with some interest, and I have to say, I really don't understand what all the fuss is about?

There's no getting away from the fact that the Silver Sky is guitar that's been heavily inspired by the Strat… but what else were people expecting? Mayer has played Strats throughout his career. Okay his first PRS model was a very different kettle of fish, but that was for his Grateful Dead stuff, which obviously requires a different kind of guitar than his day-to-day stuff would.

Given that he continued to play his old Strats live and in the studio even after he began working with PRS, it was clear that there wasn't a guitar in the company's existing range that worked for him as well as a Strat, and so of course Paul Reed Smith and his designers are going to go out of their way to create a guitar for him that fulfilled his requirements – that's surely the point of a signature model!

I want to commend you for not getting bogged down in all of the online noise about the Silver Sky, and reviewing the guitar on its own merits. PRS certainly aren't the first company to make an S-type guitar that isn't Fender, and John Mayer isn't the first guitar player to leave a guitar brand and ask someone else to make something that's very, very similar – remember Eddie Van Halen moving from Music Man, to Peavey and then Fender/EVH? Or Steve Lukather and Albert Lee ditching their Fenders for Music Man designs, for that matter?

Superstar guitarists want what they want, and given that Mayer is probably the most famous modern guitar player on the planet, why wouldn't PRS want to make him a guitar that he'll be comfortable using night after night?

No it's not the most original thing, but if your review is anything to go by, it's an absolutely phenomenal instrument, and it's also the first PRS I've ever fancied buying, so honestly, who can blame them!?

Michael Naylor, via email

TGM **Fair points all, Michael – the Silver Sky has proved divisive, and while everyone's entitled to their opinion, in our experience, playing one tends to remove a lot of people's reservations. That was certainly the case for some of the *TGM* team!**

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LOCK AND LOADED

Dear *TGM*, your article in the April 2018 issue about 'vintage Les Paul tone' was extremely fascinating, and I was surprised to see the name Duggie Lock mentioned.

I first heard of him, when a drummer friend of mine, Pete Sturgeon, joined a band in Devon, back in early 1971, called ELGOR, and Duggie was one of the guitarists. I was told, not long after Pete had joined the band, that our Duggie 'went shopping' in London, and came back with, "A pair of Cowboy boots… oh, and this Les Paul as well!" It was said at the time that he got the Les Paul from "someone in Spooky Tooth."

I actually got to meet Duggie at an audition for the band Holy Mackerel in about February 1974, in the depths of Kent. On that occasion he wasn't using his Les Paul, and was instead sporting a sunburst Firebird VII, which still had all the other guitarists drooling!

My second and final encounter with him was in August 1984, when a bass-playing mate of mine threw together a support band for a Steve Marriott gig at the Royal Standard in Walthamstow. I met most of the band on stage (literally – there was NO rehearsal time whatsoever!) and Duggie was there, and as far as I can remember on this occasion, he was playing *that* Les Paul Burst.

After the gig, he seemed to disappear quickly, which was a shame, because I wanted a chat with him, but on the plus side I did get to have a good drink with Marriott afterwards, who told me everything I had wanted to know about his roller coaster career!

Bob 'Angelo' Sawyer, via email

TGM **It's always nice to hear from former members of Iron Maiden in the letters pages, Bob, and thanks for sharing your memories of Duggie Lock with us. If your anecdote about the Firebird VII is anything to go by, clearly his Burst wasn't the only gorgeous guitar that he played in his career…**

VINTAGE VIBES

Dear *TGM*, I'm a Strat-playing blues guitarist at heart, and I'd never really played a humbucker equipped guitar that didn't sound muddy to me, especially at the neck pickup.

However your recent article about Les Paul tone set me thinking, and I decided that maybe I could buy a cheap Les Paul-ish guitar and mod it on a tight budget, in a similar vein to what Huw Price has been

doing with his Greco in DIY Workshop in the magazine.

So, I started researching and decided that I'd buy a Vintage V100 as my base instrument, trusting the Trevor Wilkinson connection, as I regularly gig a Fret-King. My plan was to start by upgrading the pickups and trying to get as near to a Peter Green/BB King sound as I could, in order to provide an alternative to my usual Strat Texas blues tone.

Cue much internet scouring, and I eventually found a very reasonably priced V100 that, looking at the pictures, had different pickups in it to the stock model. So, taking a risk I took a six-hour round trip to have a closer look. After checking it over I paid £100 cash and took it home for a thorough service. The pickups turned out to be Seymour Duncan Alnico II Pros! It had upgraded machine heads, it also had Orange Drop capacitors and upgraded Alpha pots, so much of my job was done already! I paid a local guitar tech to rewire it out of phase at the middle selector position and he sorted out a raised fret. In short for less than £150 I now have a mahogany body, set-neck single-cut with pro pickups and sorted wiring and have finally got a humbucker equipped guitar that I love the sound of!

The truth of what makes great LP tone is there in your article, and I've found that there are bargains out there, too! Thanks for the inspiration and keep up the good work!
Graham Hyde, Yorkshire

TGM **Thanks for your letter, Graham, and what a fantastic find! While doing a project can be loads of fun, there's a lot to be said for someone else taking the strain and doing it for you. There are definitely bargains to be had out there if you look, whether it's on Reverb, eBay or in our own Readers' Ads on p128!**

PICKUP LINES

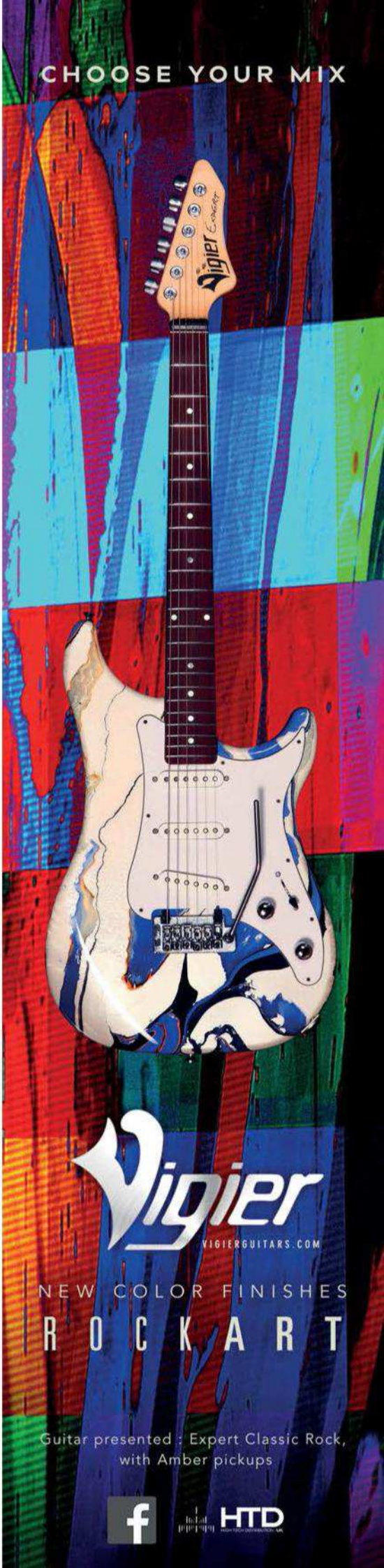
I wanted to drop you a line to give my thanks to Huw Price. I have owned a well-used 1970 Gibson ES-345 for many, many years (bought when they were not too sought after) and used it for hundreds of gigs, but several years ago I retired it, feeling that the pickups were jaded and sounding rather lifeless.

I had tried all the adjustments and tweaks that I knew of, but the dear old thing just sounded tired.

When I read Huw's comments on the pickup settings on the Duggie Lock LP I thought I'd try the same thing on the 345. Absolutely fantastic! The sounds are open, articulate and wonderfully full of character with a touch sensitivity and level of expression that makes playing pure joy.

We should each aim to find our own voice and my lovely 345 has given me just that.
Bill Baker, via email

TGM **Thanks for your email Bill – it's great for us to see the practical advice we give in the mag being put to good use, enjoy your revamped 345!**



New Music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven new releases

Arctic Monkeys
TRANQUILITY BASE HOTEL & CASINO

Doesn't it feel like it's been a long time since Arctic Monkeys burst onto the scene ready to conquer the world with attitude, killer hooks and unprecedented MySpace hype? If the final point in that triumvirate didn't give it away, that's because it has – it's now 12 years since *Whatever People Say I Am, That's What I'm Not* became the fastest-selling debut album in British history. It stands to reason then, that a band will have changed a great deal since then, and *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino* certainly feels like Alex Turner and co trying something different.

This isn't the first time they've attempted this, of course – their last record, 2013's *AM*, saw them disappear into the desert with Josh Homme and return with an album of brooding menace. In the five years since, Turner has worn a variety of different hats, including returning to 60s revivalists The Last Shadow Puppets and it's something that echoes strongly here on *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino*.

From opening track, *Star Treatment*, the album sets out its stall and barely deviates – 11 tracks of lo-fi 60s and 70s-inspired sounds upon which Turner weaves his droll lyrical observations. Tremolo-heavy clean picking, honky fuzzed up lines and gently reverbed chords are the order of the day for Turner and his guitar partner Jamie Cook, but they're here to support, rather than take the lead.

Instead, Turner and returning producer James Ford have let themselves explore the full gamut of studio options – horns, strings, incidental percussion, organs… it all comes together to create an authentically retro brew.

That's not to say that the guitar isn't prominent at times, and it's unfailingly enjoyable when it is. *She Looks Like Fun* is driven by a wonderfully scuzzy ascending and descending riff that bursts into a meandering solo, all anchored by the wandering muted bass of Nick O'Malley.

Equally, the lo-fi funky fuzz riff that drives *Four Out Of Five* is undoubtedly catchy, especially when echoed in the bass – it's a motif that sticks in the head long afterwards.

But these moments are too few and far between to really make this stand out from the rest of the band's canon. Too often the songs meander along melodically, while lyrically, Turner's previously razor-sharp observations feel dulled.

With its pleasing grooves and laid-back demeanour, this is a great album to throw on of a quiet evening and luxuriate in. What it lacks, however, is some of the edge and attitude that has made the band such a compelling force in the past.

Josh Gardner

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *The Last Shadow Puppets, Scott Walker, Pulp*

ON Guitar OFFICE STEREO

Ryley Walker
DEAFMAN GLANCE

Ryley Walker says that there aren't a lot of (overt) musical influences on this, his fifth album, but the spirit of 60s and 70s touchstones such as John Martyn and Nick Drake still endures. Fans will be relieved that, rather than reinvent his sound, he's just delved deeper into aspects of it, for a complex, varied set that will reward repeat listens. The instrumentation, from a cast of musicians from Walker's beloved Chicago home, contains a few surprises, including synths, flute and even some eerie delayed percussive craziness (on *Accommodations*). As for the highlights? Despite its languid guitar lines, opener *In Castle Dome* has an air of Hendrix's most universal songwriting about it; Walker's ability to make disparate styles warm and pliant in his fingertips is evident as *Can't Ask Why*'s refracted soundscape intro coalesces gradually into focus; and *Opposite Middle* and album closer *Spoil With The Rest* are hopeful tunes, filled with a radiant energy. **CM**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Nick Drake, Jonathan Wilson*

Gaz Coombes
WORLD'S STRONGEST MAN

Listening to Gaz Coombes' third solo album might indicate why he now shares a management team with Radiohead. Coombes' songwriting has become increasingly refined over the years, given to similarly intriguing production details and quirky twists – such as the spiky guitar riff in *Walk The Walk*, or the malfunctioning keyboard that tops off *In Waves*, which also sports an inventive bassline and atmospheric intro worthy of *A Moon Shaped Pool*. Nonetheless, Coombes occupies his own world: the title track appropriates a lazy hip-hop flavoured beat for a falsetto-fuelled anthem, and *Shit (I've Done It Again)*'s regret-laden melancholy is worthy of an adult Disney movie. There's also the fierce *Deep Pockets* – whose krautrock rhythm propels it towards a thrilling finale – while the unhinged paranoia of *Vanishing Act*, the stately *Deserter's Songs* and the lovely *Slow Motion Life* round out a hugely impressive effort. **WW**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Radiohead, Guy Garvey, Turin Brakes*

Joe Bonamassa
BRITISH BLUES EXPLOSION LIVE

There's little doubt now that Joe Bonamassa is the hardest working man in blues, as evidenced by this latest live album/concert film. *British Blues Explosion Live* captures the essence of Joe's recent A Salute to the British Blues Explosion Tour – a blast around select UK venues that saw him pay homage to British guitar icons such as Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page and Eric Clapton. He pays that tribute via a 14-track set of covers that encapsulate the golden era of 60s blues-rock. From the sizzling opener *Beck's Bolero* to a funked-up version of Zeppelin's *Boogie With Stu*, to channelling his best Beano-era Clapton on *Double Crossing Time*, the affection and reverence that Bonamassa has for these guitar icons is clear. And while he obviously puts his own spin on things, he's careful not to drift too far from the essential recipe that made these songs great, giving Bonamassa obsessives and general blues-rock fans alike plenty to get their teeth into. **GJ**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Gary Moore, Jeff Beck, Eric Clapton*

Skindred
BIG TINGS

Ragga-metal is a genre that is dominated almost exclusively by Skindred. On their seventh record, however, they've discovered a rich seam of groove-laden melodies and accessible choruses for us all to enjoy. *Big Tings* begins with a fizzy guitar that lends itself to Benji Webbe's more melodic vocals. It still has a Godzilla-like weight, but counterpointed by singalong backing vocals and a radio-friendly chorus. *That's My Jam* introduces more traditional riffery, but with childlike female vocals behind Webbe's lead, and a subtle talkbox in the bridge. Pop sensibilities are reintroduced at the midway point and the chorus to *Last Chance* is a stand-out. *Tell Me* is newer territory – reminiscent of latter-day Deaf Havana mixed with Skindred's new fervour for groove. Big Tings brings Skindred into rock modernity; an inventive and artistic record that proves their ability to drift between genres without losing their nous or integrity. **SR**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Sevendust, Deaf Havana, Proceed*

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THE REVERB TOP 10

FUZZ PEDALS

There comes a time when every guitarist needs to add a bit of snarling fuzz to their sound. Dan Orkin from Reverb.com runs down the online gear marketplace's top selling units...

Ah, fuzz: one of the simplest, oldest, and arguably most sonically recognizable of guitar effects. Even for non-players who don't understand the whole pedal thing one bit, simply citing 'the intro to *Satisfaction*' will illustrate the power and enduring legacy of the effect.

In today's pedal market, there are more fuzz options than ever before. The simplicity of the basic fuzz circuit means that most pedal companies have at least one fuzzbox in the catalogue, and some, such as Big Muff originator Electro-Harmonix, has numerous different flavours of its classic pedal to choose from. It's a lot to consider if you are after a new fuzz tone for your rig. Today, we're going to look at the most popular fuzz pedals over the past year on Reverb, covering both new and used sales from our global gear marketplace.

Seen something you need to add to your board? Head to Reverb.com and pick one up for yourself!

1 Electro-Harmonix Op Amp Big Muff Pi Reissue
The Big Muff is the single most popular and iconic fuzz pedal of all time, and last year Electro-Harmonix released two reissues that pay homage to different eras of classic Muff tones, but in small and affordable packages. The Op Amp Muff is closely associated with Billy Corgan and his tones in the Smashing Pumpkins. In fact, you can find a demo with Billy playing the reissue on the Reverb YouTube channel.

2 Electro-Harmonix Green Russian Big Muff Reissue
The other reissued Big Muff from last year, the Green Russian, replicates pedals from a chapter in the early 90s when Electro-Harmonix shut down its New York factory temporarily and was operating out of Russia. These Muffs are known for their added bass punch, and they're favoured by sludge metal guitarists and all manner of bass players who want to add some dirt to the low-end.

3 Electro-Harmonix Big Muff Pi
While the two specialist Big Muffs mentioned above rose to the top of the pile last year, the standard Muff, with its iconic large box enclosure, continues to sell well. If you just want a fundamental fuzz tone, this is the standard issue.

4 Chase Bliss Brothers Analog Gain Stage
Released to rave reviews at the Winter NAMM show back in 2017, the Brothers from Chase Bliss Audio is really much more than a fuzz pedal, packing six circuits across fuzz, drive, and boost modes. Its two channels are internally stackable and endlessly tweakable, meaning that this standalone pedal can cover just about any drive and fuzz sound you might imagine.

5 JHS Muffuletta
For the Muffuletta, the innovative minds at JHS Pedals effectively replicated the nuances of six different Big Muff pedals within one compact unit. Five of the options represent different eras of historic Electro-Harmonix Muffs made famous by the likes of David Gilmour and J Mascis. The sixth mode offers JHS's own preferred tweak on the original circuit.

6 Electro-Harmonix Nano Big Muff Pi
Yet another classic take on the Big Muff concept from the crew at Electro-Harmonix, the Nano simply takes the standard circuit and shrinks it down into a smaller box. For players with growing pedal collections but limited pedalboard real estate to accomodate them, this is an obvious choice over the rather bulky standard model.

7 ZVex Fuzz Factory Vexter
ZVex's Fuzz Factory was a game changer in the realm of boutique fuzz designs when it first came out. An aggressive, glitchy and gritty type of fuzz, the Fuzz Factory creates wild oscillations that can be variously controlled via gate and stab knobs.

8 Electro-Harmonix Big Muff Pi with Tone Wicker
Yet another Big Muff iteration, this particular model adds a 'tone wicker' circuit that kicks in a high-end circuit boost for added treble content. There's also a switch to bypass the tone control, which is lacking on the standard-issue Muff.

9 Jext Telez White Pedal
The Jext Telez White Pedal was an exclusive Reverb release, which means it ranks higher on our list than it does across the whole pedal market. This pedal is designed to replicate the tight, fuzzed-out tones of the Beatles 'White Album'. If you're a Beatles fan, this is a fantastic pedal to add to your board.

10 Death By Audio Fuzz War
Built by the noise-rock mavericks at Death By Audio, the Fuzz War is a popular choice for the more adventurous rock guitarist who craves unbridled helpings of noise as part of their overall tone.

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REN

AISSANCE MAN

Jonathan Wilson is a modern day psychedelic polymath. From producing the hottest alternative artists on the planet and performing alongside prog icons to releasing some of the headiest pop music you'll hear today, it seems that there's nothing the laid-back Laurel Canyon resident can't turn his hand to. As he releases his superlative third album, *Rare Birds*, Teri Saccone picks the brains of one of the most interesting characters in modern guitar music...

Photography ELEANOR JANE

Jonathan Wilson is that rarest of creatures: a creative purist. A guitarist, producer and songwriter of enviable talent, Wilson's music may be steeped in the dreamlike sounds that filtered out of Laurel Canyon in its early-1970s heyday but his recent work owes as much to Trevor Horn and has the widescreen ambition of Kate Bush or Peter Gabriel.

Don't let his relaxed demeanour and intoxicating music lull you into a sense that he's not making the most of every spare minute – Wilson just might be the modern heir to James Brown's famous title of 'the hardest working man in showbusiness'. From the impressive surroundings of his Fivestar Studios in Echo Park, he's sat in the producer's chair for artists as varied as Father John Misty, Conor Oberst, Roy Harper and Glen Campbell. He's also in demand as a musician, having performed and collaborated with the likes of Erykah Badu, Wilco, Jackson Browne, Graham Nash and many more.

It's a stacked slate that goes someway to explaining why his new album, *Rare Birds* is his first since 2013's *Fanfare*, but that's not even the full story. For the last few years, Wilson has been the lead guitarist and musical director (although he deflects the latter with typical humility) in the band of Pink Floyd legend, Roger Waters. It's a gig that's taken him around the world, and also seen him contribute to Waters' critically lauded 2017 album, *Is This The Life You Really Want?*.

But throughout all his other endeavours, the threads of *Rare Birds* have been percolating and developing, finally coming together in an album that's already a surefire entry in many 2018 Best Of lists. Expansive and arrestingly

ambitious, it clocks in at a sprawling 80 minutes, but there's artistic progression, too. The nucleus of 2011's *Gentle Spirit* was guitar-based psychedelic folk, 2013's superlative *Fanfare* saw songs structured around a Steinway, but *Rare Birds* is an edgier proposition than its predecessors. Although imbued with broad 1970s musical references, he's also injected an 80s feel and even some straight-ahead rock. A theme running through all of his projects is a knack for sounding big, yet intimate – his record label aptly describes it as "maximalist".

MOVING ON

We catch up with Wilson during his recent European tour, on a rare afternoon off in Amsterdam. As the amiable North Carolina native traverses the city's famous canals, we wonder if the presence of synths and electronic drums on *Rare Birds* represents a concerted effort to break with his Laurel Canyon revivalist reputation, but he insists it was an organic change.

"The songs developed naturally and I didn't set up specific tonal ideas," Wilson insists. "I just knew I wanted something a bit more like myself. I was the Canyon folky dude for a while, pursuing sublime 60s/70s acid rock fuzz tones. I don't hear many other people achieving that sonic touchstone. I loved it but I didn't want to create a pastiche either. The synths and drum machines were precisely what I used starting out as a youngster. So I'm back to where I began with those."

Listening to *Rare Birds*, the influence of his time with Roger Waters can be heard at several moments – we wonder how much working with the Floyd icon informed the album's writing.

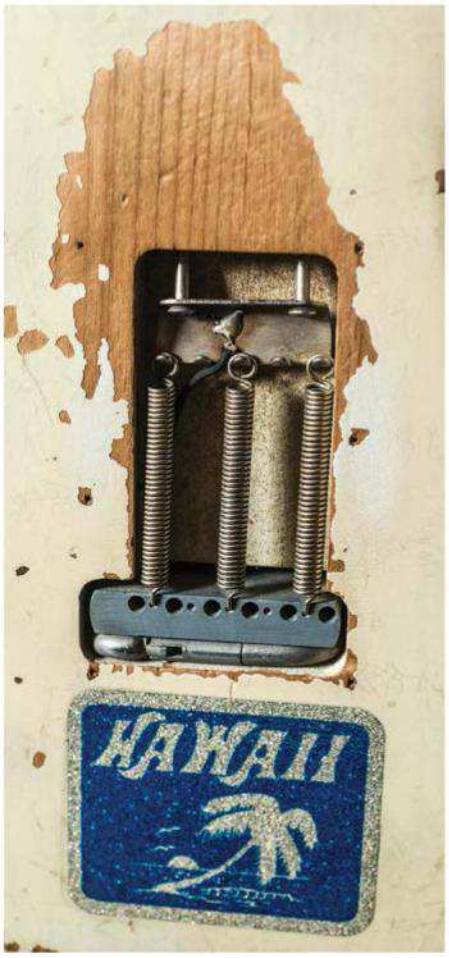
"Insofar as a lot of my songs were done at the same time," he explains. "He'd be in my studio all day and then afterward I'd return to my songs, and the same amps were there, my guitars were there in tune. I have this little handmade ghetto board that sits under my mixing desk. He'd say it was, 'Weird, home-made hippie shit'. But a lot of that, and my pedals, ended up on his record and mine, too."

TOP GEAR

Wilson's lifelong obsession with recording and guitar gear began when he was a teenager, when he bought himself a portastudio – a humble Tascam. Since then, however, things have ballooned substantially.

"It would fill a couple of tractor trailers at least," he wryly admits of his gear collection. "I'm one of those psychotic people who buys it all, fixes it all, carts it all around the world and sets it up to produce people who come to me."

Indeed, Fivestar Studios has become a Mecca of vintage gear, but he's not always been about buying the gear – he was a notable luthier at one point, but now admits that crafting instruments was a vehicle to fund



Jonathan: "The Strat is a partscaster I put together with my dad way back in 2004. It was one of the first guitars I put together. The pickups are special, they're made by Alan Hamel"

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his gear addiction. "When I made guitars it enabled me to buy gear," he adds. "I'm so enthralled with equipment. It's my life."

As befits any rabid collector, Wilson has countless effects pedals as his disposal, and it's something that's recently seen him move into putting his name on boxes made by boutique maker Jext Telez, creating Jonathan Wilson's Canyon Climber – a faithful recreation of his Shin-ei Companion fuzz, with added boost.

"I put my name on these because they are not vanilla-sounding," he explains. "These are nasty, broken-sounding, they are made by people who heard my solo stuff and my guitars on the Father John Misty stuff, so they tried to approximate my studio technique to get that nasty sounding fuzz in a pedal. They cascade on top of each other and sound great."

When it comes to guitars, Wilson's collection is large and diverse, but he primarily leans on the classic designs, albeit with a typically unconventional slant.

"I own about 75 guitars... but there's a lot of extraneous stuff," he notes. "I'm mostly a Strat player. I have one that I put together with my dad that I still use, and I have one customised by Alan Hamel. It's an '84 standard American Strat. It's super-ugly, a Ferrari red, but sounds great. I also have 335 replica from Canada that does these '59 Les Paul-style tones. I also have a Strat crafted in Indonesia, which is coated with gold leaf – I converted it to a Coodercaster-type thing. That's a $100 guitar we made into something cool.

"Most of the action for me is in the amps. I have a '68 Marshall 50-watt Plexi, a vintage PA cabinet, a PA column from the 60s... Plus four 1963 Bassmans. On the Waters tour, I loaned one to Roger, which is kinda cool, plus I use a shit-tonne of amazing amps, including a Hi-Tone DG-50. For my own shows, it's the Bassman and Marshall."

"I MADE GUITARS TO ENABLE ME TO BUY GEAR. I'M ENTHRALLED WITH EQUIPMENT. IT'S MY LIFE"

MU-TRON LEGACY

In addition to his love of fuzz, Wilson's guitar playing has become known for his liberal use of a Mu-Tron envelope filter similar to the one made famous by the sublime Jerry Garcia.

"I first got my Mu-Tron Micro V just to try out and I kept it," he recalls. "I still use that for the vocal sound it gives me, I like that because it sharpens the melodic connections. Same thing when I use the talkbox. The Mu-Tron is an extension of that."

Despite the Garcia associations, his love of the Mu-Tron didn't come from Jerry, though he does describe himself as a bit of an acolyte.

"Yeah for sure," he explains. "But not at the time I got the Mu-Tron, which was a long time ago. Since then I really discovered him and the Dead, and have done stuff with GD members. But Jerry was a luminary to me."

At Fivestar there lives an historic console: a rare Cadac board that once lived in the legendary Wessex Studios in London, and saw the likes of Queen, Sex Pistols, King Crimson and The Clash make use of it for their recording needs.

Jonathan's carefully chosen pedalboard, which features various boutique boxes, plus his signature model Jext Telez Jonathan Wilson's Canyon Climber fuzz

"It was up for auction and someone told me about it," Wilson recalls. "I bought it for $50,000. The photos were really blurred online, so it was a leap of faith to buy it, as I couldn't be sure it would show up. It's so exciting to have and use."

EXTENDED MIGRATION

With such a non-stop schedule of production and touring, he admits that the birth of *Rare Birds* hasn't been the easiest, and it's taken him a long time to get it to its current state. "It was arduous, a long haul," Jonathan adds. "I had started some of this in 2013, I scheduled myself in a studio in Joshua Tree to work at one point. I did about nine songs there. I pulled myself away to lay down guitar tracks. I kept getting hijacked to mix (Father John Misty's universally acclaimed 2017 album) *Pure Comedy*, or go on tour with Roger. But those projects gave me time to think about the tracks."

Speaking of the Pink Floyd mastermind, from a distance, the pairing of the laidback guitarist and the eternally outspoken Englishman may seem an unlikely one. Yet Waters has embraced Wilson musically and personally – he fondly calls him the band's "resident hippie". Wilson brings not only his incredibly deft guitar skills and sumptuous tones, but also superlative background vocals – a combination that recalls another Strat-toting guitar player that Waters has stood next to on stage...

Given that mix, it's perhaps not surprising that he's been given the 'musical director' title, even if it is one that he's clearly uncomfortable with.

"It's a de facto vibe, really," he insists. "It grew out of playing on his album. We made about 60 to 70 per cent of his album at my

Jonathan's live amps comprise a '63 Fender Bassman and a '68 Marshall Plexi

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Jonathan's Gibson Jackson Browne – like all his acoustics, it uses the Trance Audio Amulet stereo pickup system

Jonathan on his main acoustic: "The Gibson is a first year J-50 – 1947. I got it in Hollywood about 10 years ago. It was cheap because it was beat up, but I knew it must sound good if it's beat up!"

studio. So the sounds we developed as a band became a significant part of his live show. But I certainly can't take so much credit. I had gone to his Desert Trip show. That band sounded great and I didn't think he'd want to change it. But he did, which was risky and the band feels more like a band rather than a random collection of musicians."

HIGH WATERS MARK

Despite the stadium-sized audiences that he plays to on the Waters tour, Wilson assures us that there are no inherent pressures... with one notable exception. "Stress only happens if I'm on stage and play a wrong note," he chuckles. "And then I'll think the whole stadium hears it, which is probably untrue."

Waters himself also has a bit of a reputation as an abrasive character, but Wilson is keen to dispel that notion. "He's such a personable dude and the whole band have become pals with him and each other," he insists. "It's such a great gig, too, because it's all about rock 'n' roll spirit where it's more about the intent rather than perfect execution."

That intent carries over into the solos, which Jonathan shares with Waters' other touring guitarist Dave Kilminster, where old-school musicality is the prime concern ahead of technical fireworks.

"You must be able to sing the solo, or there's an issue with the melodic component," Wilson explains. "I know so many guitarists that are great players and can mimic great melodies, but there is a disconnect between their hands and creating melodies. It's a gift I think, and not everyone is connected to that."

"ROGER WATERS IS SUCH A PERSONABLE DUDE, THE BAND HAVE BECOME PALS WITH HIM"

As with any artist who spends a long time away from the limelight, Wilson accepts that his sojourn into other pursuits has meant he's faded from view somewhat since the critically and commercially successful *Fanfare* – but it's clearly not the easiest thing to rebuild your following.

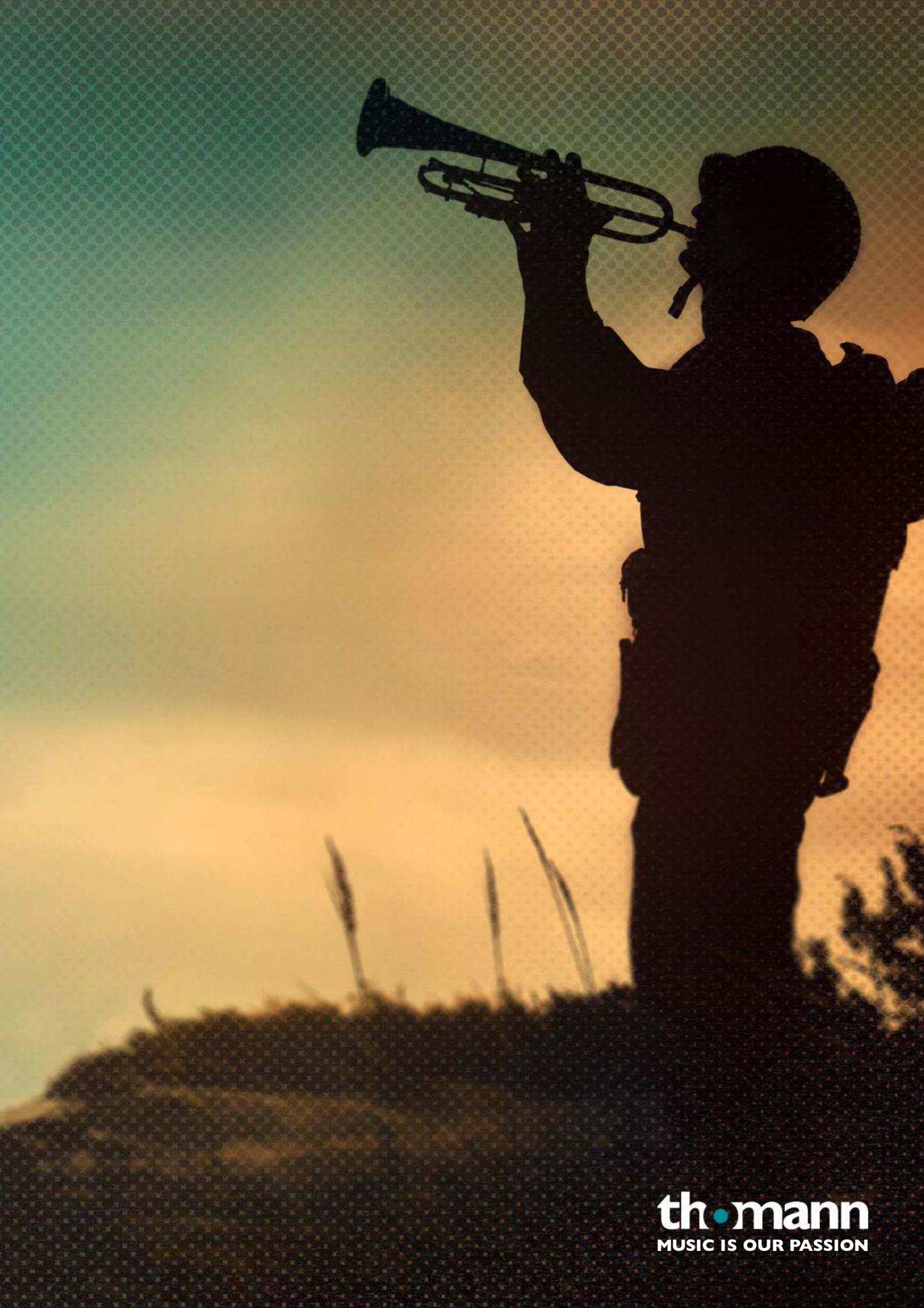
"It's a challenge to be on the road in that I've been off the map since *Fanfare* so we're in small venues again," he sighs. "I'm not yet at a point where I can truly enjoy the process. But it's infinitely exciting to get back on stage with my band, expanding the new songs. To make the show a truly sensory experience is my ideal. I'm not going for something as huge as what Roger did with *The Wall*, but that's the ultimate."

He has to make the most of these opportunities, however, as the call of his other life is never far away. "I'll keep doing my solo tour until I meet Roger in Spain, then I'll do another 45 shows with him then jump back into my solo tour," he observes. It's another packed schedule, then, and we have to wonder if he doesn't wish he had time to stop and appreciate what he's achieved – but Wilson is having none of it, replying contentedly, "My next day off is 16 December..."

Jonathan Wilson's Rare Birds is available now on Bella Union

MUSIC TRUMP(ET)S WAR

Once upon a time, there was a man with a trumpet. And when he was a soldier in the US Army landing on the beaches of Normandy, he kept it by his side. Once, when he was standing guard at night, his captain told him: "Don't play tonight, there's a sharpshooter out there." But our man thought: "That guy out there is just as scared and lonely as me. I'll play a piece for him." The next day, a POW was brought into the camp, and he asked: "Who is the trumpeter that played 'Lili Marleen' last night? When I heard that song, the war was over for me - I just couldn't use my gun any more." The man with the trumpet was called Jack Leroy Tueller. And though it may sound like a fairy tale, this is a true story. A story only music can write.



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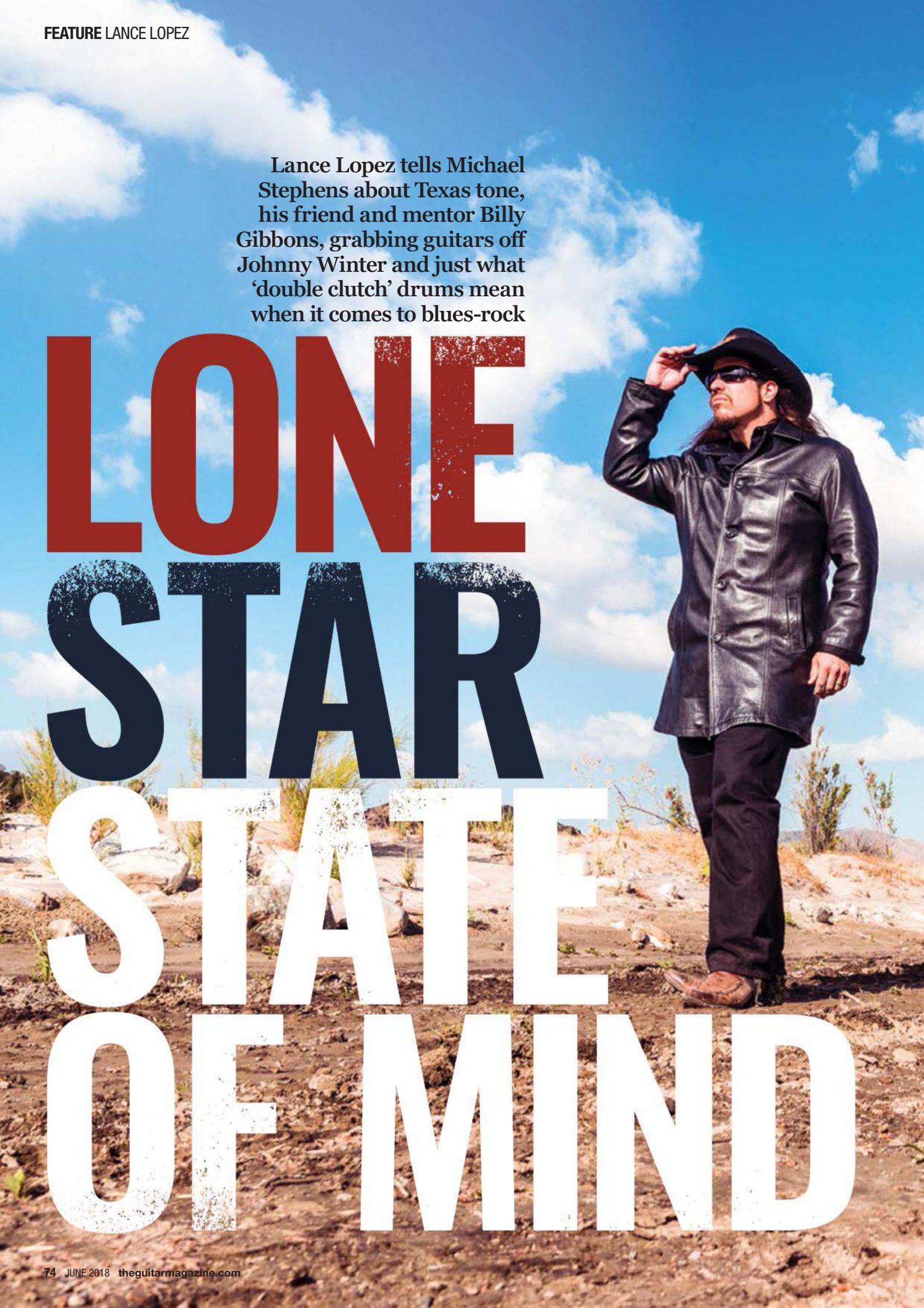
MUSIC IS OUR PASSION

Lance Lopez tells Michael Stephens about Texas tone, his friend and mentor Billy Gibbons, grabbing guitars off Johnny Winter and just what 'double clutch' drums mean when it comes to blues-rock

LONE STAR STATE OF MIND



"Clang!" What's that sound? "Clang!" There it is again! It's the sound of Lance Lopez dropping names like he has greased hands, but to be fair to the 40-year-old blues-rocker, he's got the pals to do it. If the Dallas-dwelling Lopez has been "around the block", it's certainly a big one: new album *Tell The Truth* is the latest instalment in a career that's seen him part of guest-packed project Supersonic Blues Machine (featuring Lopez, Billy F Gibbons, Warren Haynes, Robben Ford, Walter Trout et al), playing with the Buddy Miles Express, backing Johnny 'Guitar' Watson and Little Milton, being mentored from age 16 by Gibbons, being gifted Gibbo Firebirds by Johnny Winter and even knowing Elvis as "my dad's friend" (Lopez Snr and The King were amigos before, during and after their US Army spell together).

Tell The Truth – LL's enviable namedrops aside – is Lopez's own chance to shine. It's big, beefy blues rock that won't win any prizes for subtlety, but those hands *do* play with greased speed: it will sit proud against your SRV, Gary Moore and Leslie West discs. Lopez talks as fast as he plays: so let's crank it...

"MY FATHER AND ELVIS PRESLEY WERE CLOSE FRIENDS, THAT INSPIRED ME TO PLAY GUITAR"

The Supersonic Blues Machine albums were guest-packed: but this is just you. In a nutshell, what's the difference?
"Supersonic Blues Machine was always a temporary thing. When I started recording *Tell The Truth* is really what started SBM. I contacted [producer and SBM bassist] Fabrizio Grazzi to do my solo record... and it kinda sidebarred off into recording two Supersonic albums. Over that whole period, my days were: first part of the day – Supersonic Blues Machine: second part of the day – working on *Tell The Truth*.

"I tried to keep it totally separate. Supersonic was different: Fabrizio produced it, it was super-polished, the sessions were very *serious*. Not that my album isn't, but it is looser, it's a way to unwind."

Did you ever get the feeling the SBM albums had too many guests? That it wasn't a very coherent thing?
"To a degree. But all those guitar players are my friends, heroes, guys I have known for years, y'know?

I grew up as a sideman, playing for many legendary artists, so I enjoy being in a band. I didn't feel like I wanted to fight for centre stage, if that's what you mean. It was certainly great play on the road live for the first album, especially with Billy."

You were an early starter: you began playing aged eight, right?

"Yep. It was all because my father showed me a video of Elvis Presley. My father and Elvis were close friends in Shreveport [Louisiana, where Lopez was raised], even back in the time of the *Louisiana Hayride*, before Elvis was *really* famous, around 1954. So my father had seen his friend 'become' Elvis: that inspired me to want to play guitar, and it meant my dad was always real supportive, too."

To the extent that your dad used to take you to blues clubs when you were a teen?

"Yeah, as I got better he did, and within a few years I was playing guitar for Johnnie Taylor... but it wasn't just him. Because of the Johnnie Taylor shows, I ended up backing Bobby 'Blue' Bland, Johnny Guitar Watson, Little Milton... I was a kid, really, and half the time I didn't even know who they really were, y'know? But I was on stage with 'em! I've talked to guys who've been to Berklee, 'cause at one point that's what I wanted to do. They all said: 'Man, while we were at Berklee we wished we were doing what *you* were doing'. I'm very grateful for those opportunities I had."

Your playing sounds inherently Texan, somehow. Is your blues rooted to your own sense of place in the Southern states?

"Well for me, what happened in the UK was as monumental as anything else. The Bluesbreakers' 'Beano' record, Cream, Peter Green. I wouldn't know about the blues if I hadn't owned a copy of Cream's *Wheels Of Fire*, that's how I found *Crossroads*. So Cream was as big as Albert Collins, Freddie King and everything else from Texas to me."

But those guitar styles are noticeably different, too…

"Oh yeah. For years, Texas was a real Fender country. If you didn't show up with a Fender, you weren't cool! I used to play Fender. I bonded with Stratocasters when I first saw footage of Hendrix. The versatility suited me, too – as a sideman to a lot of soul and blues singers, I'd need that funky sound, and it's great for that. But what really drove it home was seeing Stevie Ray Vaughan in concert. He was so powerful live, I'd never heard Stratocaster tone like that. Giant tone. And that was a huge thing in Texas."

And yet you play humbucker-loaded Gibsons now…

"Yeah, but I always had Les Pauls and SGs as well because of me loving the 'Beano' album, *Led Zeppelin II*, the Jeff Beck records [*Truth*, *Beck-Ola*, *Blow By Blow*] on a Les Paul.

"I got a few nods along the way. I opened for BB King, and I took him along a Stratocaster to get signed. And BB actually said; 'all you young guys playing blues-rock now are playing Stratocasters... you need to get a Gibson!' When BB tells you that, man [laughs]. When I was out with ZZ Top, I had Strats and Gibsons, mainly Flying Vs actually. And Billy would come out on stage and help me find my sound

BILLY IN THE MIDDLE

Lance and Billy Gibbons have played together both live and on record, but their friendship goes much further back..

"I first met Billy when I was 16. There was a famous club here in Dallas called The Greenville Bar & Grill, and they had a fantastic Monday night blues jam. Stevie Ray Vaughan used to hang out there… any travelling blues musician would always pop in. When I was 16, I'd been invited to a Monday night blues session. Great! I decided I'd play a complete Jimi Hendrix that night – all the classics – I was just eating, breathing and sleeping Hendrix back then. Next door there's an Italian restaurant called Tirelli's, and Billy was eating there with friends.

"Billy heard me through the wall! He came over and the club manager introduced me to him backstage. Billy just lowered his sunglasses and said: 'Y'know, I knew Jimi Hendrix and he was my friend.' First thing he ever said to me. He told me all the stories about Jimi giving him a guitar, giving him lessons, them sitting together listening to Jeff Beck records, it was so cool. I was 16!

"Billy became a mentor. He really educated me about old blues records. Primarily, electric Chicago blues - Jimmy Reed, Elmore James, Lightnin' Hopkins, people like that. Billy taught me so much. We lost contact for a few years, but reconnected when Eric Clapton had his first Crossroads Festival here in Dallas. And later, I opened shows for ZZ Top. So working together in Supersonic Blues Machine was a long culmination of events. I'm honoured to have Billy as a mentor: he's always believed in me. He's a genius. I understand why Jimi Hendrix loved him so much, I can see them being creative kindred spirits."

WINTER OF CONTENT

Another friend of Lopez was the late, great Texan bluesman Johnny Winter. Lopez's *Live In NYC* album (2016) was recorded during Winter's 70th birthday celebrations in 2014 at BB King's Blues Club in NYC.

"I was around Johnny a lot in the latter part of his life. It was really cool, but also a little sad, because he could see the mistakes he'd made. I wished he could have let go of some of that anger, towards his former manager, other people.

"Being around Johnny was a real education, though. When I was hanging with him, we'd listen to nuthin' but country blues. All day! If we put on some Chicago blues like Howlin' Wolf, anything after 1955, that was like modern music to Johnny. Everything else was Robert Johnson, Sonny Boy Williamson, Blind Willie McTell, a lot of Blind Willie Johnson. Johnny loved Blind Willie Johnson because he was also from Texas.

"Johnny had such a knowledge of those guys – he knew their stories, he knew where they travelled. And the two of us being from that area, we had such a good visual of that.

"Johnny was very honest and my own album being called *Tell The Truth* is like a reminder of Johnny. He had no filter. If he didn't like you, he'd tell you. But if he liked you? Well, I was fortunate enough to be in what was, I think, a pretty small circle. I think it was that common ground, knowing the same Texas places, which helped so much in us having that bond.

"I never really played a Gibson Firebird until I started hanging out with Johnny. He thought they'd suit my style. I was at his house and he just said: 'Go and get one of mine!' Straight up. He had tons of 'em."

"I'VE PLAYED SOME REAL '59 BURSTS, AND I'D CHOOSE MY GUITAR EVERY TIME"

at soundcheck and when I pulled out the Gibson he was like: 'Mmm, now *that's* your tone.' I talked a lot with Billy about tone. He told me how BB had influenced him to use lighter gauge strings and we bonded on that. Steve Ray was the opposite, but on a Strat. But between BB and Billy's advice... well, that pretty much shifted me over to Gibsons pretty much full time."

What are you main guitars now?

"A '59 Les Paul reissue – a Gibson Custom Shop R9. The Gibson Custom Buckers are amazing. I don't agree with some people calling only the old ones 'real' Bursts! They're all real Bursts, it's just some are vintage and some are reissues. I've played some real '59s and compared them to my guitar, and I'd choose mine every time. My main Firebird is a limited run in Pelham Blue of the 1961 Firebird V. I've talked a lot with Warren Haynes about Firebirds. He reckons his non-reverses are a little closer to a Les Paul than a reverse. My blue one, with mini-humbuckers, is a classic-sounding one: it's got that spanky tone that helps me revisit some of that material I used to play on a Strat."

How you would define the difference between Texan and Chicago blues, or the blues-rock that you play?

"All the differences in styles of blues are environmental. A primary thing makes Texas blues what is, is the shuffle that goes way back to country swing music. Bob Wills And The Texas Playboys, Western swing artists of the 30s, well they were even around during the time of the delta blues. The shuffle – the 'double clutch', as we call it – is on the snare drum. The Chicago-type of shuffle was very different, because that's on the kick drum.

"You'll hear the Texas 'double clutch' on early Albert Collins tracks – *Frosty* is a great example. You'll also hear it on Johnny 'Guitar' Watson tracks, they had a thing in Houston that was all its own.

"When it became blues-rock, you had the famous drummer Doyle Bramhall – well, he was famous to *us*. Frank Beard of ZZ Top was his sidekick and ZZ Top's *Tush*, *La Grange* and Steve Ray Vaughan's *Pride & Joy* – there's your Texas shuffle. And it was Doyle Bramhall who educated both Frank Beard and (Double Trouble's) Chris Layton. Whereas Chicago blues is all about the kick drum.

"When you're talking about blues guitar it may seem odd to talk about drums but it's those things that set up the pattern of the song, and that differentiates so much of the styles. Blues is such a broad spectrum – not just the guitar, but the drumming, whether there's horns or not... You gotta listen to the whole picture."

Lance Lopez's new album, *Tell The Truth*, is out now on Provogue/Mascot

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CRIMSON KING

We visit Crimson Guitars and talk old-school luthiery, prog legends and digital love with head honcho Ben Crowe...

Story CHRIS VINNICOMBE
Photography JOE SUPPLE & CHRIS VINNICOMBE

Based in an old dairy in the pleasant surroundings of sleepy rural Dorset, Crimson Guitars is no ordinary guitar company. Headed up by master luthier and founder Ben Crowe, Crimson has been designing and hand-building distinctive guitars for 14 years now, but a key distinction between the brand and other boutique operations is that Crimson also offers a range of guitar building, maintenance and repair training courses, and it also manufacturers and sells its own luthiers' tools. The company was also quick to embrace online video and has built a 100,000-strong community on YouTube.

"I've always wanted to build things," recalls Ben when we ask how it all began. "I realised quite rapidly that I was never going to make a living playing guitar. I just didn't have what it takes. I'd always been playing around, chopping headstocks off instruments, customising and repairing and I thought, 'If I can't make a living playing guitars I still want to work with the things'. There's something so sexy about guitars and that world in general... I thought!"

BAROQUE & ROLL

Having made the decision that luthiery would be his vocation, Ben's first formal training in instrument making began by

Pirates only

Crimson currently manufactures around 20 instruments every month and they can be found at several major retailers including GuitarGuitar and Absolute Music

winding the clock back several centuries. "I ended up sort of conning my way onto a course building baroque instruments," he remembers. "It was seven miles away from where I was living in Chichester at the time, and they must have been short of a placement or something. I got one of seven slots at this particular college on a three-year course building baroque instruments. And I realised that I really don't enjoy building baroque instruments!"

It didn't put him off, though: "I fell in love with using hand tools and with the proper craft side of things – there's a difference between using that level of tools versus a CNC machine or even a router and a bandsaw. But, through all of that I always wanted to build electric guitars."

All that said, there were certain principles that were transferable from the baroque world into electric guitar-making: "The final fit and finish, especially on a production guitar, is one of the most important parts of it," Ben affirms. "You can choose the wood, and I know that this type of wood is going to sound good, pretty much whatever I do to it, as long as my joints are good, it's going to sound good. The last five per cent of what I do as a luthier is the first thing that the customer will see, and that's what I learnt specifically in the violin world.

"I would spend three, or four, or five days working on the final carve for a viola da gamba top and you scrape a quarter of a mil off and bend it and put it back together and do more scraping... it's all about touch and feel. That level of quality

and that level of meticulousness has transferred over to everything that we do now. Be it the design of the business itself, or the instruments, I'm a little bit anal!

"There's a certain amount of insanity in anybody who starts a business," Ben grins. "From day one I thought I was going to take over the world! Absolutely! We're going to have the biggest guitar factory in Europe and we're going to make thousands of guitars! And this was me in a really, really shitty shed at the end of my garden with spiders dangling down from the ceiling! Even back then I thought, 'Yeah, we're going to do this'. And quite luckily, because there's a lot of luck involved, we are now achieving some of the things I'd hoped for."

SEE YOU IN THE COURT

Crimson's growth in the physical world of sawdust, tonewood and hand tools has been mirrored by the company's impressive online footprint. Surprisingly, Ben's inspiration for his digital strategy came from an encounter with progressive-rock royalty. "I was very lucky. Very early on I met Robert Fripp," he explains. "When I was brainstorming the name for Crimson Guitars, King Crimson came up on whatever music TV show I was watching at the time and I thought, 'Ooh, Crimson, nice... strong... powerful... good for a logo, it's red!' So that was the name."

Coincidentally, two or three months later, Ben's business mentor from the Prince's Trust happened to mention that he had grown up with Fripp. After an initial introduction, "I met him and started repairing some instruments for him and then he commissioned a guitar. My favourite thing he ever said was, 'Ben, the luthier is the rockstar's rockstar. Go away and build me a guitar, whatever you want.' And I built him a guitar and it was all wrong! 'Now go away and build me what I want!'"

For Ben, Fripp's approach to the internet proved as much of an inspiration as his guitar-playing: "He has a blog. He takes photographs almost every single day and puts them out there on his website. And I saw that, and he has so any people who follow that, and I started doing the same thing. I started taking photographs, 30 or 40 a day, of whatever I was building, and they would go out through Twitter and Facebook and Tumblr and all of those things.

"While looking at the numbers of people who were coming to learn how to build guitars because I was documenting it, I was thinking,

Christopher Owen: Master Luthier and teacher at Crimson Guitars

Just one example of the gorgeous tonewoods at Crimson's disposal

L-R: Crimson's Raw Series Descendant (£1,595), Masterbuilt 'The Mutineer' (£4,195) and Custom Shop Descendant in black-stained, flamed ash (£1,895)

One of Crimson's Raw Series Descendant models in a state of undress

'Okay, what's the next stage? How do I get these people to buy something from me?' Because most of them are hobby builders who can't afford or don't want to buy a guitar, they want to build their own.

"YouTube was three or four years old at that point and people were saying, video is the next thing, we've finally got the bandwidth to utilise the internet for streaming purposes. And obviously guitar making is the only thing anybody wants to watch on video on the internet! And that was it, I thought, 'I'm going to learn how to make video'."

After videos promoting Crimson Guitars helped generate more orders than Ben could physically make, the company quickly expanded and now has around a dozen staff on the payroll. "I always thought that I was going to be in the workshop, in the dust, and not in an office dealing with things," admits Ben. Happily the company now includes managing director James Blackburn along with a director of operations, accounts manager and media manager, taking care of daily business, freeing up Ben to spend more time prototyping, experimenting with finishes and working with his beloved tools.

"I want to make things, I don't want to be sitting behind a bank of computer screens," Ben insists. "I am a craftsperson, I am a maker." And long may the guitar-making continue.

For more from Ben and Crimson MD James Blackburn, visit youtube.com/theguitarmagazine to see our extended interview. Visit crimsonguitars.com to find out more about the company's instruments, luthiers' tools and guitar-building courses, which start at £210

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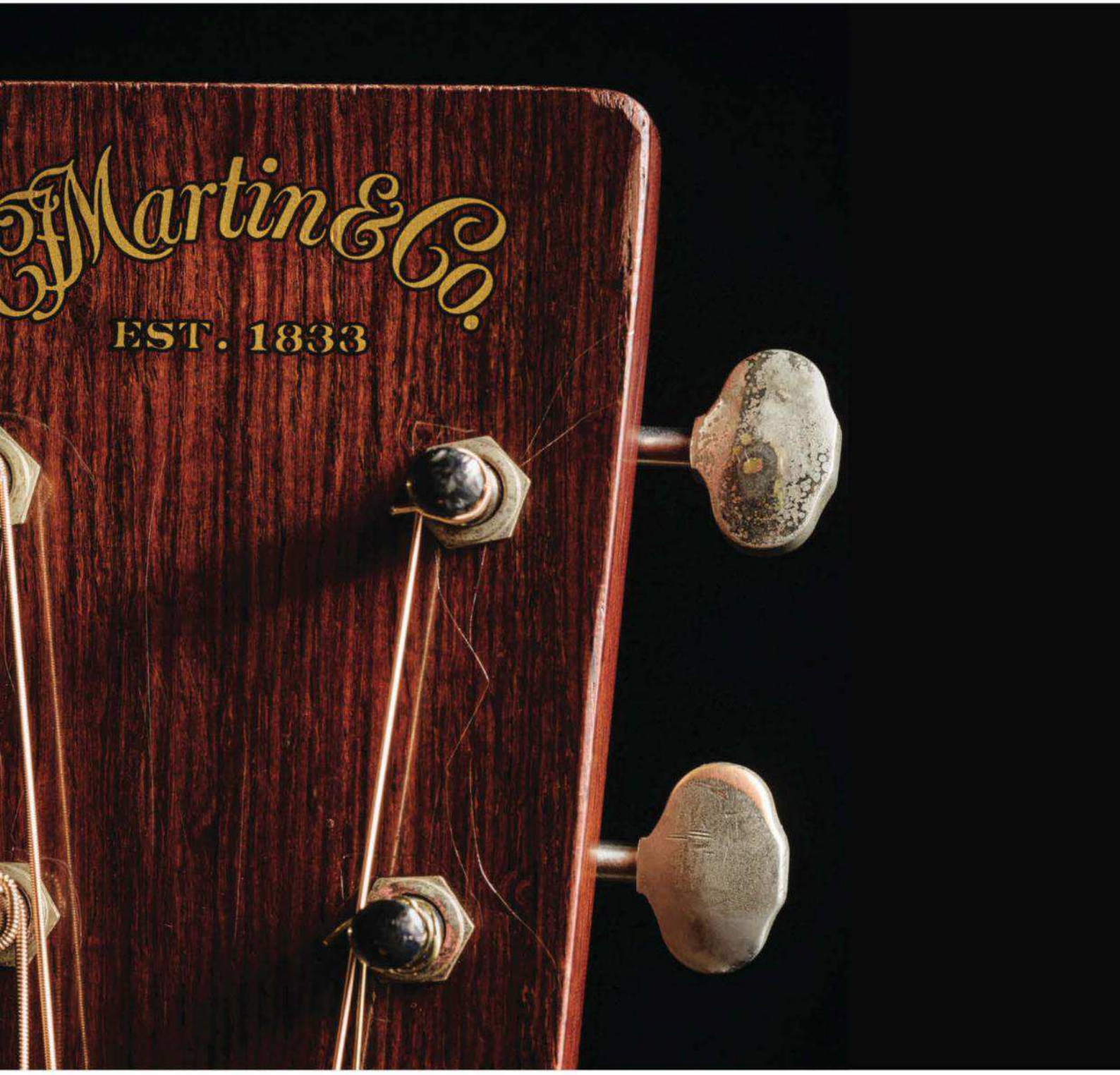

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GEAR REVIEWS

Everyone loves a chance to celebrate, don't they? And when you're marking your 135th year, as Gretsch Guitars is in 2018, it's definitely worth shouting about. So turn back to p20 where you'll find a pair of gold-standard Anniversary models at very different ends of the price scale. Elsewhere in this issue, we're feeling the old-school vibes thanks to stunning aged electrics from Eastman and Maybach, and a 50s-style bass from Fender, too. If space-saving effects are your bag, then the scaled down versions of Jeorge Tripps' Way Huge pedals are big news, but if you really want some revolutionary tech, check out UA's OX on p94 – you may never need to mic up an amp again…

Gretsch G5420TG Electromatic 135th Anniversary Ltd & G6118T-135 Anniversary Limited Edition **20**
Two limited edition Gretsches in stunning two-tone livery

Maybach Albatroz 65-2 ..... **88**
Old-school SG vibes from the German guitar builder

Eastman SB59/v-GB **92**
Vintage-style single-cut gets a 'burst and Lollar pickups

Universal Audio OX **94**
Revolutionary box that takes care of all your micing needs

Rift Amps Tweed Vee **98**
Boutique take on one of Fender's most revered early amps

Way Huge Smalls pedals **102**
Scaled down versions of three classic Way Huge boxes

Radioshop ID:Chris Buck Loaded Strat Pickguard **104**
A simple way to beef up your Strat's tone

Fender American Original '50s Precision Bass **107**
The classic gets a 'best-of' American Original overhaul

The Albatroz's fingerboard is bound rosewood with pearloid trapezoid inlays

MAYBACH ALBATROZ 65-2

Having wowed us with the Lester single-cut, Maybach's Albatroz offers another take on a familiar vintage theme for sensible money. Huw Price wings it...

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

We first encountered this model on Maybach's stand at the The Guitar Show in Birmingham earlier this year, and despite it being surrounded by some of Maybach's outrageously flamey Lester models, this horny little devil certainly attracted a lot of attention from people wandering the show floor.

Maybach isn't coy about what this guitar is all about. What the Lester models are to Les Pauls, the Albatroz series is to SGs. Until recently, all of Maybach's Albatroz models replicated the single-P-90 'student' model, but this is the first with double humbuckers – a set of German-made Amber Spirit Of '59 PAF replicas.

The Albatroz even has the little three-ply plastic insert between the neck pickup and the end of the rosewood fingerboard that characterises the earliest SG Standards that came equipped with PAFs. Besides being a clever little design motif that echoes the shape of the fingerboard's pearl inlays, it goes with the original pickup positioning and neck join. On later SGs, the neck appears to be set a little deeper into the body and the neck pickup ring butts up against the fingerboard.

It's well documented that Les Paul felt there were inherent problems with the SG design and it has been suggested that he declined to have his name associated with the model. In subsequent years, even the most diehard SG proponents would probably concede that Les made some fair points. With its ultra thin body, the SG's neck join has become notorious for its weakness.

What's more, the skinny necks that featured on some of the early 60s models gave the SG a somewhat 'whippy' quality – part guitar, part bow and arrow. Pete Townshend exploited the SG's lack of rigidity to great effect, but many owners endure an ongoing struggle to keep them playing in tune.

For this reason, we're pleased to note that Maybach is building the Albatroz with a fair degree of heft to the neck. It's by no means a fat 50s profile, but there's sufficient depth to the D profile here to ensure a far more stable and solid feel. Maybach describes this as the 'Handy 65' neck shape.

The neck, like the body, is carved from solid mahogany and it's just about possible to make out the grain through the TV Yellow nitro finish. We're not sure that Gibson shipped any early SG Standards with this finish, but one of the best things about tributes is that you can have the feature set that you want rather than be constrained too much by vintage correctness.

THERE'S RESTRAINED AND CONVINCING LACQUER CHECKING, WITH SOME LIGHT CHIPPING AROUND THE EDGES

Ditto the artificial ageing and, as we have come to expect from Maybach, it's rather well done. There's restrained and convincing lacquer checking, with some light chipping around the edges. The newness is taken off the nickel plated Gotoh hardware and the plastic parts are devoid of glassy shine, but there's no sense that arbitrary damage has been inflicted and the guitar has a look that's clean and inviting.

We're not quite so impressed with the thick fingerboard binding or the sharp lacquer line running all along its length. We suspect the binding

KEY FEATURES
Maybach Albatroz 65-2

- **PRICE** £1,614 (inc case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody 6-string electric guitar. Made in Czech Republic
- **BUILD** Mahogany, set mahogany neck, bound rosewood fingerboard
- **HARDWARE** Gotoh tune-o-matic bridge, aluminium tailpiece & Kluson tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Amber 'Spirit Of 59' humbuckers, individual volume & tone controls, three-way pickup selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 628mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.58mm at nut, 52.60mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20mm at first fret, 23mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.1mm at nut, 51.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 2.98kg/6.56lbs
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes (10% upcharge)
- **FINISHES** TV Yellow, Wine Red, Vintage White nitrocellulose
- **CONTACT** Maybach Guitars **maybach-guitars.de**

The artificial ageing has been carried out in tasteful fashion

was masked off when the TV finish was applied and the clear lacquer top coats have insufficient depth to smooth the transition. Damage has also been done to the clear lacquer through rough fret edge dressing when the bevel was being created.

Fortunately we have no such quibbles about the electrics, with CTS pots, cloth covered hookup wire and exceptionally neat soldering. Maybach has also lined the control cavity and cover plate with copper foil – always nice to see.

IN USE

Through the employment of vintage Kluson-style tuners, the neck heaviness is kept to a minimum and while we were slightly underwhelmed by Maybach's neck profile on the Lester model we reviewed, the carve here feels entirely in keeping with the style and vibe of the Albatroz.

With a low and slinky action, the Albatroz arrives with a decent setup. Our only gripe is an A string nut slot that's cut a tad too deep, which causes the open string to buzz.

Acoustically, the Albatroz gets off to a flying start. The unplugged tone has a fast and lively response with an abundance of harmonics, an even response across the frequency range and plenty of natural sustain. After a pleasant interlude of Townshend inspired strumming, we get serious and fire up a Vox AC10.

Although the pickups are the same units we tried on the Maybach Lester, we are slightly more impressed with their tone in the Albatroz. Once again they are quite microphonic, but this time the midrange dominance isn't as pronounced and we hear an effervescent bite at the front of single notes and more tautness from the low strings.

Unlike other guitars in the Albatroz family, this sports a pair of Amber humbuckers

Maybach's headstock outline is a Larson Bros-inspired design

THE ALBATROZ IS A VERY FINE GUITAR... FOR ROCK TONE THAT WILL CUT THROUGH A MIX, IT'S HARD TO BEAT

The bridge combines nasal upper-mid honk with a hint of twang that is undeniably 'vintage' in nature. Chords have a satisfying 'brrrang' quality, with superb string-to-string definition and an in-built compression that's ideal for rhythm playing and fingerpicked slide.

Perhaps surprisingly, the acoustic airiness that's almost entirely absent from the bridge setting comes through with the neck pickup. It's a smoother, more rounded and woodier tone, but it's an ocean away from the pseudo jazzbox tones you can pull out of a Les Paul. All in all, the clean tones are serviceable, in the way they tend to be with SGs, but the Albatroz finds its true voice through a cranked amp.

Cutting straight to the chase, the Albatroz is a very fine SG-style guitar and to borrow a telling phrase that's recently been heard a lot around these parts… "it sounds just like the records". The bridge setting may not be as versatile or nuanced and a Les Paul, but for straight ahead rock tone that will cut through any mix, it's hard to beat.

With the Albatroz, you get a fine contrast from the neck pickup that can veer in tone from flutey to something that's closer to a clarinet. What the Albatroz lacks in complexity and versatility is balanced out by a directness and no nonsense simplicity that's very easy to fall for. It does get a tiny bit muddy when you turn down and, depending on your amp settings, the tone controls may venture beyond 'woman tone' into muddiness. But for vintage-voiced blues, rock and metal tones it's the real deal.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Convincing vintage vibe
+ Quality ageing job
+ Lightweight
+ Impressive tone

– The detail along the binding could be better

An SG tribute of the highest quality with a feature set that would command substantially more money from certain American manufacturers

9/10

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The obvious alternatives are **Gibsons**, such as the locking tuner-equipped **SG Standard** (**£1,219**) or the more vintage-correct **SG Standard Reissue FC VOS** (**£3,051**). The **PRS Mira** (**£1,307**) adds a compensated wrapover bridge to the double-humbucker, all-mahogany formula

EASTMAN SB59/V-GB

The award-winning single-cut returns with new pickups and a fresh lick of old-style paint. Chris Vinnicombe fans the flames...

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

We first encountered Eastman's Antique Varnish single-cut at Winter NAMM 2017 and it went on to scoop a highly commended badge in our Gear Of The Year awards. Much as we admired the amber-hued finishes in which the SB59/v was initially offered, we always hoped Eastman would find a way to combine its proprietary ageing techniques with a more conventional sunburst. Well, the company has cracked it – and the results are pretty spectacular.

For 2018, the SB59 comes in this gorgeous and tastefully aged Antique Goldburst. At first glance, it really does look like a well-loved and slightly faded 60-year-old sunburst guitar, albeit without checking as only the colour coats are nitro – the top coats are still French polished. Also new is a pair of Lollar Imperial humbuckers, custom-wound and voiced to Eastman's specifications.

Eastman's huge violin business gives the company formidable buying power when it comes to materials, and this guitar is proof. The one-piece mahogany back is solid, but the guitar's overall weight still falls into the optimum zone, while the two-piece maple top has an attractive deep dish carve and a mesmerising flame that ripples under lights.

The neck is a little slimmer than last year's model but the shape of the carve steals the show. One of the reasons why 1950s Les Paul Standards feel so great is that their necks usually have very soft shoulders, often to the extent that the nominal C profile has a hint of soft V. It's a similar story here and one that makes for an exceptionally comfortable ride along this single piece of mahogany. It's no slavish LP copy though – aside from the SB59's altered body outline and lack of additional headstock 'wings', Eastman installs its medium-jumbo frets over the ivoroid fingerboard binding, while the 'board itself is an attractive slab of ebony inlayed neatly with iridescent pearl crowns.

IN USE

Acoustically, the vital signs are very good: the SB59 is loud and alive with sustain and resonance but there's bite and snap too. Plugged in and played clean you get sparkling harmonics, huge scope for expression and notes that won't run out of gas before you want them to. Although the Lollar Imperials are wax potted, they've only been potted lightly so there's still plenty of air.

Rev up the drive and the touch-sensitive and harmonically rich characteristics are still present, and this translates into lead sounds with just the right balance of smoothness and edge. It's never cloying; the Eastman retains musicality even down between zero and five on the tone controls, where most of their action occurs.

You know that a maker has got a Les Paul-style guitar right when it's endlessly entertaining before you've wound up the gain or stepped on a drive pedal. Out of the box, without adjusting the screw coils, low notes on the bridge pickup are possibly a little foggy but other than that, as long as you aren't obsessed with the brand name on your guitar's headstock, it's difficult to find a downside here.

YOU GET SPARKLING HARMONICS, HUGE SCOPE FOR EXPRESSION AND NOTES THAT WON'T RUN OUT OF GAS

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Stunning top and attractive ageing
+ Fabulous neck shape
+ High-quality tones

– Bridge pickup's low-end could be more vicious and defined

Unapologetically vintage-inspired in style and sound, this beautiful single-cut is our favourite Eastman electric yet

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Eastman SB59/v-GB

- **PRICE** £1,999 (inc hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody single-cutaway electric guitar. Made in China
- **BUILD** Solid 1-piece mahogany back with solid, 2-piece figured maple top. One-piece mahogany neck with 12" radius bound ebony fingerboard and ebony headstock fascia. Bone nut. 22 Jescar FW47104-P nickel silver frets. Pearl inlays, Single-action truss rod.
- **HARDWARE** Aged nickel Gotoh Relic Series tune-o-matic bridge, stop tailpiece, strap buttons and vintage-style tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Custom Wound Lollar Imperial humbuckers with aged nickel covers. Switchcraft 3-way toggle pickup selector switch. CTS 500K Audio Taper pots (2x volume, 2x tone) with Sprague Orange Drop capacitors
- **SCALE LENGTH** 24.75"/629mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 43.5mm at nut, 52.8mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20.8mm at first fret, 24.4mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.8mm at nut, 51.8mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 8.4lbs/3.8kg
- **FINISH** Antique Goldburst (nitrocellulose colour coat, Antique Varnish top coat)
- **CONTACT** Eastman Musical Instruments Europe **www.eastmanguitars.eu**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Gibson's 2018 Les Paul Traditional (**£2,199**) proves the firm still makes good guitars at sensible prices, although the Eastman is closer to the vintage LP sound and experience. **Maybach's Lester Cherry Lane 58 Aged** (**£1,730**) comes with an aged nitro finish

UNIVERSAL AUDIO
OX AMP TOP BOX

Universal Audio's OX promises to be the answer to all of your attenuation, cabinet emulation and recording needs. Will you ever need to mic up your amplifier again? Huw Price finds out...

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The only genuine alternative to the OX is the **Two Notes Torpedo Studio** (£1,269). Other attenuators featuring speaker/cabinet simulations include the **SPL Cabulator** (£551) **Rivera Rockcrusher Recording** (£687) and **Radial Engineering**'s **Headload** (£1,097), but the simulations are all-analogue and less sophisticated

The roots of Universal Audio stretch back to the 1950s and the company is unusual in being equally respected for both its heritage analogue gear and cutting edge digital technology. Even analogue enthusiasts – this writer included – have found themselves blown away by Universal Audio's digital models of classic studio equipment.

With the OX, Universal audio has used its expertise in both fields to create a reactive attenuator combined with highly sophisticated speaker, cabinet, microphone and classic effect simulations. It's a substantial but stylish unit housed in a metal case with a classy front edge of solid maple. There's an amp-style jewel light and the five control knobs are colour coded to correspond with the digital and analogue functions.

All of the important writing on the back panel is printed upside down, too, as this becomes the right way up when you're standing in front of the OX and looking over the top of it. You'll find mono/stereo line level outputs, an impedance selector offering four, eight and 16 ohms and sockets to connect an amplifier to the OX and the OX to a speaker.

There are also RCA and optical SPDIF outputs and three USB ports that are intended for firmware updates as they become available. Currently the footswitch socket serves no purpose, but this will almost certainly come into play in the near future. Physical connections to and from your amplifier are made via mono jack sockets.

UA produces several guitar amp plugins designed for computer recording, including the Fender '55 Tweed Deluxe that we reviewed in June 2017. The plugins model the amplifiers along with various speakers and cabinets, and all the processing is done within Universal Audio's various audio interfaces.

In the case of the OX, the DSP is contained within the unit itself, so you can take it to a gig or a studio and use it independently of a computer or tablet. There's no amplifier modelling because it's designed for use with your real-life, living, breathing valve amplifier. The amp output passes through the OX via its stepped attenuator and the modelled speaker outputs are entirely separate.

The OX ships with six factory-installed 'rig' presets, each combined with a different room ambience simulation that can be added to the dry rig tones using the dedicated room control. But for full access to the powerful effects processing, enormous range of options (even the rug on the virtual studio floor!) and creating user presets – six of which can be assigned to the rig control for live use – the OX must be connected to a Mac or iPad via wifi.

IN USE

If your primary interest is attenuation, the manual and quick start guide barely require a glance. Simply connect the OX to its power supply, your amp and speaker to the OX, power up and use the speaker volume control to set the level coming through your speaker. The attenuator is very transparent and there's no loss of treble or clarity, however the stepped level switching is less flexible than the controls of some reactive attenuators.

The digital connections are restricted to 44.1kHz so we opt for the analogue stereo line outputs plugged directly into our audio interface. The OX software is downloaded from UA's website and installed. We select the OX wifi hotspot from our computer's drop-down menu, enter the OX's assigned password and launch the software.

Once we're in, the interface is clear, comprehensive and impressive. There are three channels – two for close mics that can be switched on and off axis, and a third for a room ambience mic. On each channel you can select a classic dynamic, ribbon and condenser microphone model – with two choices of each.

Every channel has solo, mute and bass-cut switching, with individual

KEY FEATURES
Universal Audio OX

- **PRICE** £1,170
- **DESCRIPTION** Reactive standalone attenuator unit with separate line/headphone outputs featuring speaker, cabinet, microphone and effect modelling. Made in China
- **POWER RATING** 150W RMS maximum input power
- **FRONT PANEL** Rig, room, speaker volume, line out, headphone
- **REAR PANEL** Power switch, 3x USB sockets, RCA & optical SPDIF outputs, footswitch out, output to speaker, 4/8/16-ohm impedance switch, input from amplifier, 2x line outs
- **DIMENSIONS** 381 x 138 x 229mm
- **SOFTWARE COMPATIBILITY** Mac Sierra or High Sierra and iPad iOS 11 only
- **WEIGHT** 6.4kg/14.1lbs
- **CONTACT** Universal Audio **www.uaudio.com**

equalisation. They route to the master fader and EQ, compression, delay and plate reverb can be applied globally. If you prefer, you can pan each channel hard left or right to record each mic onto separate tracks, or separate the close mics from the ambience. Clicking the cabinet tab gives you 17 familiar cabinet and speaker types. Virtual input levels are 50 watts and 100 watts, and there's a speaker drive control that changes the compression and overdrive characteristics of the selected speaker model.

Compared to cheap and cheerful guitar amplifier modelling technology, Universal Audio plug-ins are subtle and sophisticated. However they are also very intuitive and fun to use. Selecting the virtual equivalent of the physical speaker in a couple of our test amps and comparing them, the OX sounds exactly like a well mic'd version of the real thing. In effect, Universal Audio has simulated a typical mixing desk-based pro recording set-up for electric guitar, complete with multiple mic channels and all the commonly used effects. It's powerful, versatile, extraordinarily convenient and sonically we can identify no downside.

Despite a lingering suspicion that the OX will benefit from future software updates as a result of user feedback (as is commonplace in the tech industry these days), it's already a fine attenuator and a uniquely wonderful tool for live work and recording. If you are only looking to crank up your amp at sensible volumes then there are numerous cheaper and more sophisticated options out there, but the OX offers so much more than an attenuator with some cabinet emulations thrown in for good measure.

IT'S A FINE ATTENUATOR AND A UNIQUELY WONDERFUL TOOL FOR LIVE WORK AND RECORDING

On the recording side, the clincher is whether the OX sounds as good, if not better, than a conventionally mic'd cab. If you have access to a great-sounding recording room and a selection of the finest classic mics, compressors, equalisers and reverb effects, then the old-school approach will likely still win out, but we would have absolutely no reservations about using the OX on a professional session.

For most guitarists in the real world, the usual modus operandi is to record amps in a back bedroom, cupboard or project studio vocal booth using an SM57, and compared to those approaches, we believe the OX is infinitely preferable. In addition to superior tone and flexibility, the neighbours won't complain, extraneous noises are a non-issue and spillage is eliminated. The same goes for mic'ing up on stage.

It's not perfect: the wifi-only connectivity, stepped attenuation, fixed sample rate and unassigned footswitch could all be improved, but we anticipate that some of these misgivings will be addressed as upgrades become available. The OX will almost certainly evolve and improve over time, but for now, it's already a fantastic and groundbreaking product.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Outstanding audio quality and transparent attentuation
+ Succesfully addresses studio/live issues
+ Robust build and simple to use

– Stepped attenuation
– No XLR out
– App control over wifi only

For attenuation, sending the best possible sound to a PA desk, home practising with an inspiring tone and easy recording, the OX offers a one stop solution that's hard to fault

9/10

(((INTRODUCING)))

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Westwood is a mild-mannered transparent overdrive with active EQ controls that'll still knock the socks right off your trusty low-wattage combo amp, pushing it into anything from cutting, edge-of-breakup rhythm tones, all the way to articulate, singing lead tones stacked high with pleasing even-order harmonics and sweet, sweet sustain.

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Rift -Amps
HANDWIRED IN ENGLAND

RIFT AMPS TWEED VEE

Fender's V-Front cab was so complex to construct that it outsourced production before simplifying the design and bringing cabinet building in-house. Huw Price explores the angles of a daring replica...

Fender's V-Front Dual Professional and Super amps from the late 1940s and early 1950s are rare and valuable. With over 20 watts of 6L6 power, a separate power switch and a pair of 10-inch speakers, they were well ahead of their time, and historically significant. However, due to the structural complexity of the cabinet that gave it its nickname, V-Front replicas have hitherto been even rarer than the real thing.

We have been aware for some time that Chris Fantana of Rift had a replica in development and the result is the Tweed Vee. With a pine cabinet reconstructed from measurements and plans taken from an original Dual Professional, the speakers are mounted on individual baffles, each firing outwards at an angle.

To maintain a competitive price-point, the chassis is generic rather than an exact replica, but inside there's a bona fide 5B4 circuit with octal preamp valves, yellow Jupiter capacitors and custom-wound transformers hand-wired on eyelet board. It's certainly built right, but does it sound right?

IN USE

When we assess amps as players or, in our case, in *Guitar Magazine* reviews, we are by extension evaluating the speakers and cabinets, too. When it's a mid-priced amp that's fair enough because you fork out your money and get what you pay for. But when you're contemplating bespoke boutique products such as this, there's no need to settle for the basic package.

So why mention that here? In short it's because the Tweed Vee has a split personality to go along with its split cabinet. Fantana makes a wide variety of tweed amps – the whole purpose of this project was to create an authentic sounding V-Front replica rather than something that's been tweaked and in order to correspond to preconceptions about medium-power tweeds based on later designs. So if your idea of tweed tone is the visceral thrill of harmonically dense overdrive, endless sustain and ethereal note bloom, that's not what the Tweed Vee does with the Warehouse G10A alnico speakers that it arrives with. Instead the tone is darker, woodier and thicker in the mids. There's a pronounced honk too and when you plug in a Tele, Strat or Gretsch and play at low to medium volume, you get the sense that it's the way Leo Fender intended this circuit to be used. We're talking authentic rockabilly, Western swing, jazz and old-school country lap steel.

PLUG IN A TELE OR GRETSCH AND YOU GET THE SENSE THAT IT'S THE WAY LEO FENDER INTENDED THIS CIRCUIT TO BE USED

Crank up a little and the mellowness gives way to a grainy overdrive that blurs the edges of notes and softens the low strings. The Tweed Vee seems far happier with single coils because P-90s and PAFs introduce a roughness that some ears may find a little abrasive.

Highlighting this breakup texture and the Tweed Vee's soft but slightly veiled treble is more an observation than a criticism. Regular readers may be aware that this reviewer has owned a 1951 Deluxe for many years and can report it's very much how his amp sounded before he began modding it – albeit at lower volume with a lot more boxiness. Fantana was shooting for early 50s tweed tone and he's bang on target.

Chris stressed that the Warehouse G10A speakers have an authentic 1950s American voicing and although they sound very convincing to us, their tone may be a little too niche for general playing duties. There's a nagging sense that there is more going on with this amp than we are able to hear through these drivers.

Fortunately our review amp also came with a spare set of Warehouse G10Cs, which are the Tweed Vee's cheaper stock speakers. Rather than install them in the V-Front, we put them in an AC10 cabinet to make comparisons and it's like playing through a different amp.

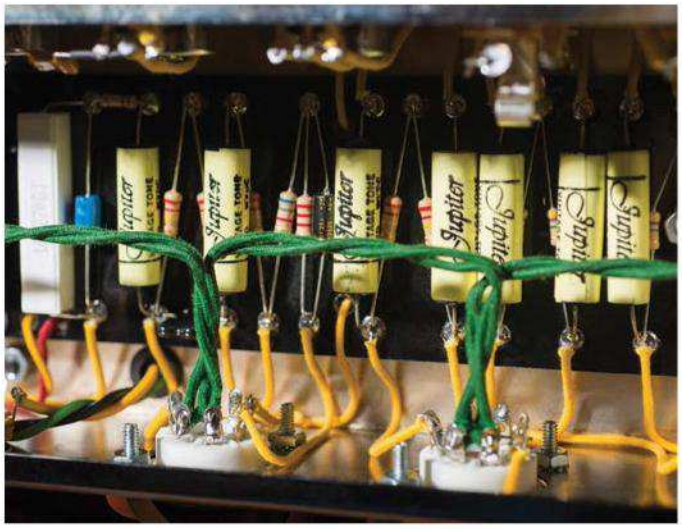
The V-Front gets louder, brighter and more articulate. With added

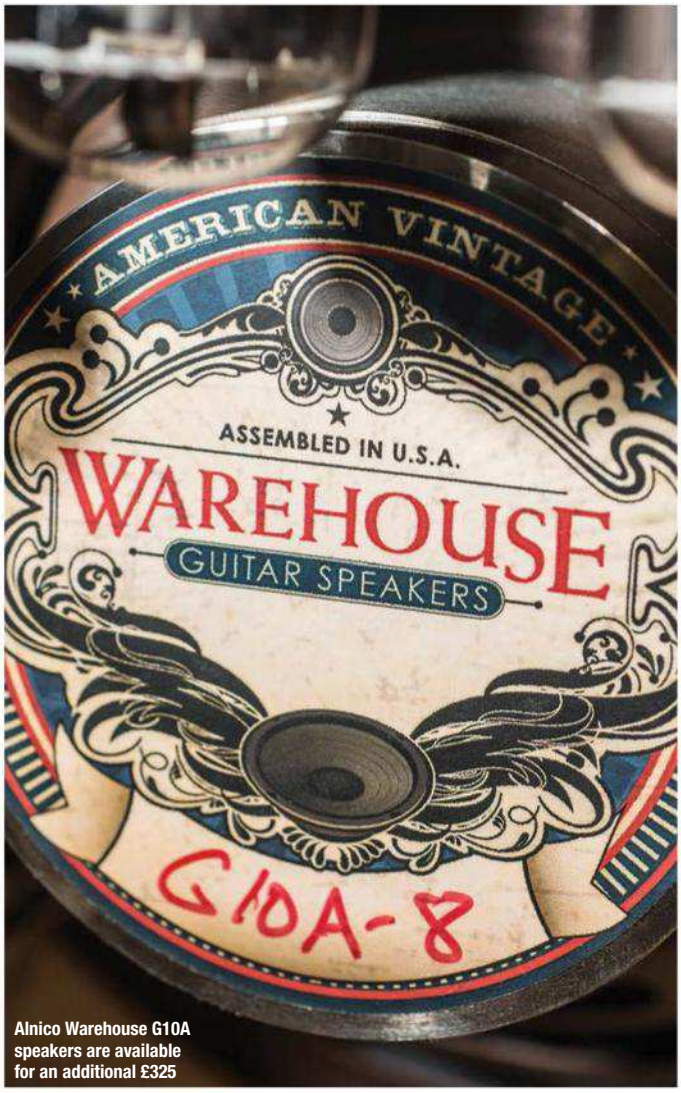
KEY FEATURES

Rift Tweed Vee

- **PRICE** From £1,899
- **DESCRIPTION** 2-channel cathode biased handwired valve combo with angled Welsh pine cabinet. Made in the UK
- **POWER RATING** 26W/12W
- **VALVES** 1x 5U4GB, 3x 6SC7, 2x 6L6GC
- **CONTROL PANEL** 4x input sockets, volume, volume, tone, power
- **REAR PANEL** 2x speaker outs, 4 & 8-ohm
- **SPEAKERS** 2x Warehouse G10C ceramic 10-inch drivers (stock). Warehouse G10A alnico speakers available for an upcharge (see below)
- **OPTIONS** Relicing (£48), dark grey tweed (£24), various jewel light colours, soft cover (£60), Warehouse G10A speakers (£325.01)
- **DIMENSIONS** 515 x 570 x 220mm
- **WEIGHT** 46lbs/21kg
- **CONTACT** Rift Amps 07762 767128 **www.riftamps.com**

The octal preamp valve gives a fuller tone than later Tweed circuits





Alnico Warehouse G10A speakers are available for an additional £325

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

At the time of writing there is a near-mint **1948 Fender V-Front Super** on Reverb, but it'll cost you a whopping **£7,950**. **Victoria** has made a few **Regal 2s in V-Front cabinets** (**£3,600 used**) but the amp itself is very different. We know of no other V-Front replicas currently in production

ceramic aggression and bite, the breakup is also smoother and sustain is enhanced. The overdrive, sustain, note bloom and dynamics we suspected might be there are revealed in all their glory and higher output pickups present no problems.

Without wishing to veer towards a speaker review rather than an amp review, it's clear that this amp's tone very much depends on speaker selection. Given the magnitude of difference with the ceramics, we install them in the V-Front cabinet and the resulting tone reveals the essence of this design.

There's no overbearing darkness here, but the upper midrange aggression that is so apparent in the AC10 cabinet is sweetened to a more compressed chime. The bass is solid, deep and punchy, but the most startling revelation is the return of the chewy and thick midrange. It turns out the V-Front cabinet's unique colouration defines this amp's tone every bit as much as its looks.

And what a tone it is. Based on our experiences with an original V-Front, this is what we'd been hoping for all along. The smoothness of the overdrive, the shimmering clarity, piano-like bass and the ability to make any guitar sound its absolute best.

THE RIFT TWEED VEE HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BE THE PERFECT TWEED AMP – MORE SO THAN THE TV DELUXE AND PRO

The alnico-loaded version is resolutely old school and has considerable but limited appeal. But with other speakers, the Rift Vee has the potential to be pretty much the perfect tweed amp – more so than the TV Deluxe and Pro. Played clean we get shades of Hendrix and cranked up, it nails the rude, mid heavy grind heard on ZZ Top's Antenna – famously recorded with one of Billy Gibbons' many V-Fronts.

The octal preamp mids are more full and sonorous than the thinner and fuzzier tones of later tweed circuits, so it's ironic that they are arguably a better match for modern speakers. Over 20 watts of power gives you early 50s tone at practical gig levels, with lively transients and a refreshing absence of small cabinet boxiness. But you can swap the rectifier for a 5Y3 and the power valves to 6V6s to lower the output if needs be. Chris Fantana has put a lot of time and effort into researching this amp and putting it into production, and we think he's done an incredible job.

Guitar VERDICT

+ Authentic vintage looks and tone
+ Vintage honk, sparkling cleans and ferocious overdrive
+ Outstanding cabinet build
+ Fantastically competitive price

– The chassis is not 100 per cent vintage-correct
– Altered tweed application

Given the quality of the tone, the flawless build and the uniqueness of the cabinet, we're astonished this costs less than two grand

9/10

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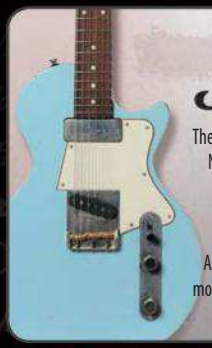

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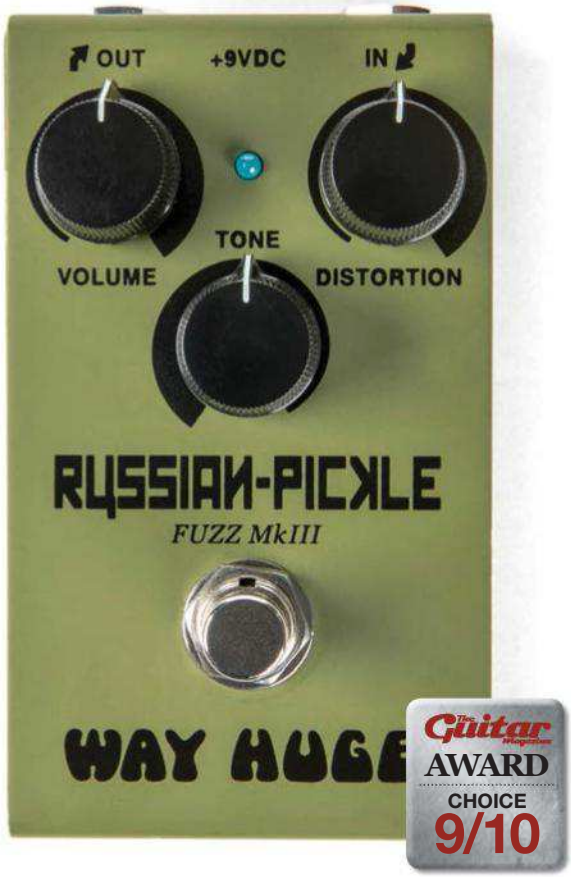

WAY HUGE
BLUE HIPPO MK III, RUSSIAN PICKLE MK III & AQUA-PUSS MK III

When is a Way Huge pedal not way huge at all? When it's been squeezed into a compact enclosure. Richard Purvis tries on some slinky new Smalls...

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Electro-Harmonix makes close equivalents to all three of these pedals: the **Neo Clone** (£59), **Green Russian Big Muff Pi** (£89) and **Memory Toy** (£84). Or keep it in the Dunlop family with the **MXR Analog Chorus** (£113), **Distortion Plus** (£92) and **Carbon Copy Analog Delay** (£159)

Let's get this out of the way, no matter how much we might like them to be, these pedals are not a signature range in honour of Spinal Tap bassist, Derek Smalls. Instead, they're much more broadly appealing – a new range of classic Way Huge effects shrunken down to more board-friendly proportions. The Smalls were launched to some excitement at this year's NAMM show, and given that 'Way Slightly Less Huge' wouldn't really have worked as a name, we're left with the oxymoronic Way Huge Smalls.

One of the most respected indie makers of the 1990s, Way Huge is now part of the Jim Dunlop empire – but founder Jeorge Tripps is still very much on board on the development side. In fact he's in charge of product development across all of Dunlop's brands, including MXR and Cry Baby. So while these pedals aren't 'boutique' any more – apart from anything else they're made in Taiwan – with Tripps at the helm, and the promise of no circuit changes from the Mk II versions, we're still expecting plenty of way hugeness in sonic terms.

HANDS ON

The sound of a chorus pedal may never again be as popular as it was in the 80s, when it was often combined with an out-of-phase Strat to create some of the corniest music ever recorded. But there's still a place for chorus, and the Blue Hippo Mk III is one box that's doing a lot to restore its reputation.

Like the full-size Mk II, it has a toggle switch for hopping between chorus and vibe modes; other than you just get the familiar speed and depth controls. This is not a tiny pedal, just a wee bit smaller than the 'compact' template laid down by Boss and Ibanez back in the day, and there's even room for a battery inside.

You might well know what's going on with the Russian Pickle from the name and moody colour scheme alone; in case you don't, the Russian Pickle is based on the dark green version of the Electro-Harmonix Big Muff Pi that was made in St Petersburg during the 1990s. The use of native components meant Russian Muffs had their own character – and while EHX's New York production was up and running again by 2000, some still prefer the Sovtek version's more beefy, growling tones.

Way Huge's tribute sticks to the classic three-knob layout, complete with pseudo-Cyrillic lettering for that distinctive 'made from old Soviet tank parts' look. Not that the originals actually were made from tank parts – that's an urban myth.

Of the three, the Aqua-Puss needs the least introduction – it's an analogue delay pedal that's earned a place on the boards of such diverse guitarists as John Mayer, Noel Gallagher and Jeff Beck. Repeat times range from 20 to 300ms, and has the same three controls that most bucket-brigade delays have been using since the late 70s.

IN USE

The first thing that happens when we switch on the Blue Hippo is that the noisefloor comes up so high we almost bang our heads on the ceiling. This is less than ideal, of course, and it's something that we're hoping is an isolated issue and not something repeated across the range. Luckily, it's also not so intrusive that we can't judge the pedal on its merits – and merits it most certainly has.

In chorus mode the modulation swirls in an almost Leslie-like fashion, adding real depth to clean tones, and you can push the depth without things getting too weird – although the tasteful, non-woozy stuff comes on the left half of that dial. That's also true of the vibe mode, where this Hippo sheds a few textural layers for a more discreetly pulsating effect. It's still something more than just straight pitch-wobble, but different enough from the chorus sound to make this a genuine two-in-one pedal.

The Russian Pickle also creates a lot of noise… but this time it's because we've asked it to. For those of us who cherish all things Muffy, there's only one thing this pedal really has to deliver: ultra-massive, ultra-smooth, ultra-rich silicon fuzz. Well, it delivers. You get all the low-end oomph you'd expect from a Russian-type, with a solidity in the lower midrange that contrasts with the fizzing, scooped-out voice of a US-made Big Muff Pi. The tone control lets you brighten up your earth-shaking mega-chords to taste, and does so without letting the velvety top end succumb to harshness.

While the market for this kind of pedal is much more crowded than it was just a couple of years ago, not least thanks to EHX launching its own nano-size Green Russian last year, Way Huge's compact effort is a lovely fuzz by any standards.

There's not a lot to say about the Aqua-Puss MkIII, really, but that's simply because it's a very fine, very straightforward analogue delay pedal. It doesn't go out of its way to win you over – there's no bells and whistles such as switchable modulation, tap tempo or rhythmic repeats, for example – but it really is great at doing the core job of being a musical analogue delay pedal. The signal loses some top end with every repeat, inevitably, but this decay is less pronounced than usual – and that means you're getting a combo of real analogue warmth with something close to digital clarity.

The maximum delay time of 300ms might be frustrating if you've grown used to emulated analogue delays with almost unlimited times, but crank the feedback into self-oscillation and you can get some cool percussive effects as the delay clock makes itself audible.

We find ourselves sticking close to that 300ms setting for the atmospheric stuff, but there are also some fine slapback sounds available near the other end of the dial. Calling it 'versatile' is probably pushing it a bit, but it offers a good range of sounds across its chosen spread, and for many guitar players, this will be all the delay you'll ever need.

IT OFFERS A GOOD RANGE OF SOUNDS, AND FOR MANY, THE AQUA PUSS WILL BE ALL THE DELAY YOU'LL EVER NEED

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

Blue Hippo Mk III

+ Nice Leslie-like modulation
+ Vibe mode has pleasing wobble
– Not the cheapest of its type
– Our review pedal has noise issues

A tidy modulation pedal with two distinct but useful modes on tap

7/10

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

Russian Pickle Mk III

+ Lashings of lovely Muff-style fuzz
+ Chunky and firm in the low end
+ Tone control lets you add sizzle without getting spitty
– It's not the cheapest

It really does sound huge… but also sweet, clear and controlled

9/10

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

Aqua-Puss Mk III

+ Perfect for simple, clear, analogue echo/delay sounds
+ Self-oscillating stuff is really tasty
– Fairly short delay time
– No modulation option

It's a tad low on features, but this is about as nice as pure, uncluttered analogue delay gets

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Way Huge Blue Hippo Mk III

- **DESCRIPTION** Analogue chorus/vibe pedal. Made in Taiwan
- **PRICE** £152.99
- **CONTROLS** Speed, depth, chorus/vibe toggle switch
- **FEATURES** True bypass, powered by 9V mains supply or battery
- **DIMENSIONS** 115x60x54mm
- **CONTACT** Westside Distribution 0844 326 2000 **wayhuge.com** **westsidedistribution.com**

Way Huge Russian Pickle Mk III

- **DESCRIPTION** Fuzz pedal. Made in Taiwan
- **PRICE** £152.99
- **CONTROLS** Volume, tone, distortion
- **FEATURES** True bypass, powered by 9V mains supply or battery
- **DIMENSIONS** 115x60x54mm

Way Huge Aqua-Puss Mk III

- **DESCRIPTION** Analogue delay pedal. Made in Taiwan
- **PRICE** £152.99
- **CONTROLS** Delay time, feedback, blend
- **FEATURES** True bypass, powered by 9V mains supply or battery
- **DIMENSIONS** 115x60x54mm

RADIOSHOP ID:CHRIS BUCK LOADED STRAT PICKGUARD

Loaded scratchplates are a simple way to radically overhaul your guitar's tone. Marcus Leadley checks out a pickguard fitted with a trio of up-and-coming guitarist Chris Buck's signature pickups...

KEY FEATURES

Radioshop ID:Chris Buck Loaded Strat Pickguard

- **PRICE** £252 (including pickups worth £188)
- **TYPE** Loaded stratchplate for Stratocaster-type guitars
- **FEATURES** 3x USA CTS 250k potentiometers (1 volume, 2 tone); vintage cloth hook-up wire; CRL 5 way selector switch; Sprague 0.047 orange drop capacitor; Switchcraft jack
- **OPTIONS** Choice of pickguard and pickup cover colour

Radioshop ID:Chris Buck Signature Strat pickups

- **PRICE** £188
- **TYPE** S-type pickups
- **FEATURES** Hand-bevelled, vintage staggered Alnico V magnets; hand-wound with 42 AWG heavy Formvar wire; 6k (N), 6k (M), 6.5k (B) DC resistance; vintage cloth hook-up wire; black fibreboard bobbins dipped in nitrocellulose; unique Radioshop 'ID' wax potting procedure; Radioshop 'Tele-fit' Strat bridge baseplate; pickups supplied with covers, screws and spacers
- **CONTACT** Radioshop Pickups 07961 046962 **radioshoppickups.com**

South Wales guitarist Chris Buck is one of the emergent standard bearers for the Mayall/Clapton/Slash school of blues and rock guitar playing. Meanwhile, boutique maker Radioshop Pickups is based in Bedwas, around 20 minutes drive from Chris's front door. Given that fact, it's no great surprise that the pair have teamed up to create a set of signature pickups. So what makes these different to other options?

Well, they're designed to deliver increased dynamics to suit his 'pick and fingers' playing style for starters, and they're also and voiced to sound particularly sweet in the 'in-between' positions (two and four) on the five-way selector. What's more, there's a Tele-style steel baseplate under the bridge pickup for a bit of added clarity and growl. The way forward regarding dynamics has been to only wax pot the outer coil windings – so they're proofed against microphonic feedback while having more of the character of vintage single coils that were dipped in hot wax rather than soaked for an extended time.

Radioshop sells these pickups for £188 – but at £252 for a fully loaded scratchplate you'll be saving yourself a fair bit of effort and creating an easy path to reinstalling the original electrics if you want to. Strats are a masterpiece of modular design so installation takes about the same amount of time as changing strings. All you need is a cross-head screwdriver and a soldering iron (three wires to change over – don't forget the earth to the bridge). Pause briefly to check out the quality CTS 250k pots, CRL five-way selector, and the quality Sprague 0.047 orange drop capacitor – all hooked up together with vintage cloth covered wire and very neatly soldered.

AT THE BREAKUP POINT, THE CLEAN TONES ARE SWEET, WHILE DAMPED POWERCHORDS CHUG ALONG BEAUTIFULLY

IN USE

Chris used a Fender Highway 1 Strat as his test bed for these pickups and, despite owning Strats with better pedigrees, it's subsequently become his favourite instrument. With this in mind we installed the loaded guard into a 1976 Strat that's been languishing, unloved, in a corner of the office for a while. And what a different beast it's become: both more vintage and contemporary sounding at the same time. At 6.5k (B), 6.0k (M) and 6.0k (N) ohms, the DC resistance exceeds the stock '76 pickups (5.0, 5.7, 6.0), while still being within the range of standard Fender single coils.

What's immediately apparent is the richness of tone and the evenness of output across all the switch positions. Also the pole-piece stagger makes for a very even response across the strings. Playing with the fingers and running the amp fairly 'dark' (à la Buck's preference) delivers so many usable characteristics.

The tone controls work properly – so you can get plenty of subtle roll-offs for different rhythm and lead duties. We love the bright, snappy and dynamic character around the amp's breakup point – but clean tones are sweet, powerchords chug along beautifully and those classic rock and blues solos can be pulled off with the proper authority – so long as your fingers know how to do the walking!

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Great sounding pickups
+ Excellent dynamic range
+ Fully loaded pickguard is a breeze to install

– Signature sound so might not suit all players

An ideal solution for sprucing up the sound of a guitar that plays well but lacks distinctive character – or simply making your favourite axe sound even tastier

9/10

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Gibson J-45 VOS (True Vintage Ltd Ed)
Circa 2008. Limited Edition. Adirondack Red Spruce Top. Vintage Appointments. Built in Fishman Pickup. No Hard Case. Photos Online

Gibson Les Paul Special
Double Cutaway. Circa 1997. P-90 Pickups. Finished in TV Yellow. Bound Neck. Very nice condition. Hiscox Hard Case. Photos online.

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FENDER AMERICAN ORIGINAL ’50S PRECISION BASS

The daddy of the electric bass returns in ‘greatest hits’ form as part of Fender’s new-for-2018 American Original series. Michael Heatley enters the time machine…

Yes, it’s a Precision Bass and the concept is pretty simple – but don’t turn the page just yet. The American Original series, which replaced American Vintage in Fender’s 2018 catalogue, is no longer year-specific, but combines key features from the chosen decade along with subtle improvements.

The first thing to hit you is the look – gloriously translucent white blonde over an alder body, set off by an anodised gold guard. It’s hard to see anyone choosing the two-colour sunburst over this! It’s a showstopper, and with a sound to match you could easily imagine yourself in the ranks of Gene Vincent’s Blue Caps or similar. The transition to a Strat-like contoured body and headstock shape happened between 1954 and ’57, so we’re talking late 50s here.

The body’s nitro finish will wear with age, and it certainly helps maximise resonance. Thanks is also due to the Pure Vintage ’58 pickup, with its vintage bobbin construction and cloth wiring; the polepieces under the A string stand proud to provide an even response.

IN USE

Played live, the American Original Precision adds authority to simple rockers by Ricky Nelson and The Shadows. There’s a feeling of ‘rightness’ you just can’t deny, though the combination of new strings and a maple fretboard set the tone control a challenge in order to turn ring into thump.

The one-piece slab maple neck – which is topped with a bone nut – has a generous 9.5-inch radius. It’s a very comfortable C shape, and those who seek visual reassurance while they’re playing will welcome very visible black dot markers on the side. Frets are Vintage Tall, the tuners are reverse in operation and the traditional four-saddle bridge does as good a job as it always did.

PLAYED LIVE, THERE’S A FEELING OF ‘RIGHTNESS’ TO THE AMERICAN ORIGINAL PRECISION THAT YOU JUST CAN’T DENY

Were you buying a Precision in the 50s, you’d have received it with flatwound strings installed rather than rounds as here. Application of a home-made sponge mute suggests this would still be a fantastic option in 2018, and would further differentiate the 50s model from its 60s sibling.

Talking of close relations, the neck is the biggest difference between this and the previous American Vintage ’58; seek out that now-superseded model if you prefer a standard 7.25-inch radius.

The obligatory plush-lined tweed case sets the Original’s finish off a treat. Pickup and bridge covers are supplied, but you’ll have to pluck up courage and drill the fixing holes yourself. Ironically, the period-correct tugbar comes ready-installed. Still, it all adds to the look.

Some may baulk at the price, and there’s always grumbling at Fender’s habit of revamping its classics, but the combination of sound and visuals makes this a contender for any player whose repertoire includes material from rock’s formative decade and beyond. A Precision with swagger!

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

You’re spoiled for choice of course, but the **Fender ’50s Precision Bass** (£889) offers much at a Mexican price point, albeit with a less generously proportioned neck. The **American Professional** (£1,559) is the contemporary take, while there could be deals to be had on the just-supplanted American Vintage ’58. At the higher end, you’re talking Custom Shop money for a **’55 Journeyman Relic** (£2,989)

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Looks the business
+ Resonant sound
+ Very easy-playing neck

– Premium models come at a price

Few innovations, but arguably the best ‘old-style’ Fender Precision available today without entering Custom Shop territory

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Fender American Original ’50s Precision Bass

- **PRICE** £1,699 (inc vintage tweed case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody electric bass guitar. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Alder body, one-piece bolt-on maple neck with 20 Vintage Tall frets, bone nut
- **HARDWARE** Vintage-style four-saddle bridge, gold anodised pickguard, reverse open-gear tuners, knurled dome control knobs
- **ELECTRICS** Pure Vintage ’58 split-coil pickup
- **SCALE LENGTH** 34”/864mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 44mm at first fret, 57mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21mm at first fret, 25mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 12mm at nut, 20mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 4.3kg/9.25lbs
- **FINISH** White Blonde nitrocellulose (as reviewed), 2-Colour Sunburst
- **CONTACT** Fender EMEA 0845 305 1122 **www.fender.com**

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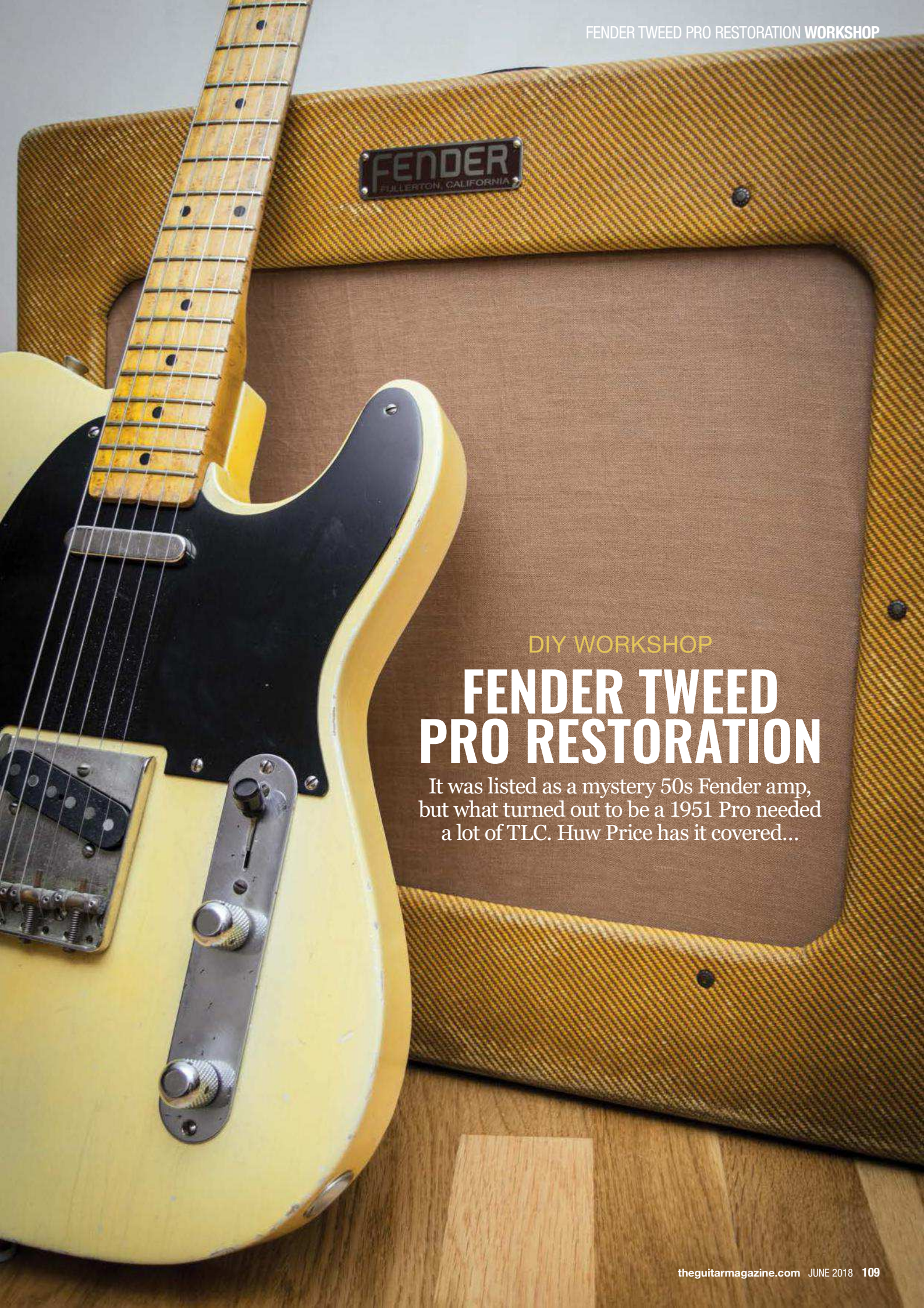


DIY WORKSHOP

FENDER TWEED PRO RESTORATION

It was listed as a mystery 50s Fender amp, but what turned out to be a 1951 Pro needed a lot of TLC. Huw Price has it covered...

1 With its drab grey tolex, the Pro looks pretty rough on arrival but it's mostly original and in great shape

A friend of mine had been looking to buy a Fender TV Deluxe for a while, but one day when browsing on Reverb he came across a curious advert for a '1950s Fender Amp'. Not knowing what he had found, he sent me the link to see if I thought it was legit. At first glance it looked like badly re-covered Deluxe, but then I noticed that it had six baffle bolts rather than four. The speaker looked bigger than usual, too, and the penny dropped. This wasn't a TV Deluxe at all, but rather the bigger, louder and rarer TV Pro.

Although it looked to be in pretty dire condition, and the seller was noncommittal about whether it worked, I felt it was worth a punt. The price was very low for a tweed Pro and the seller was okay about shipping it internationally.

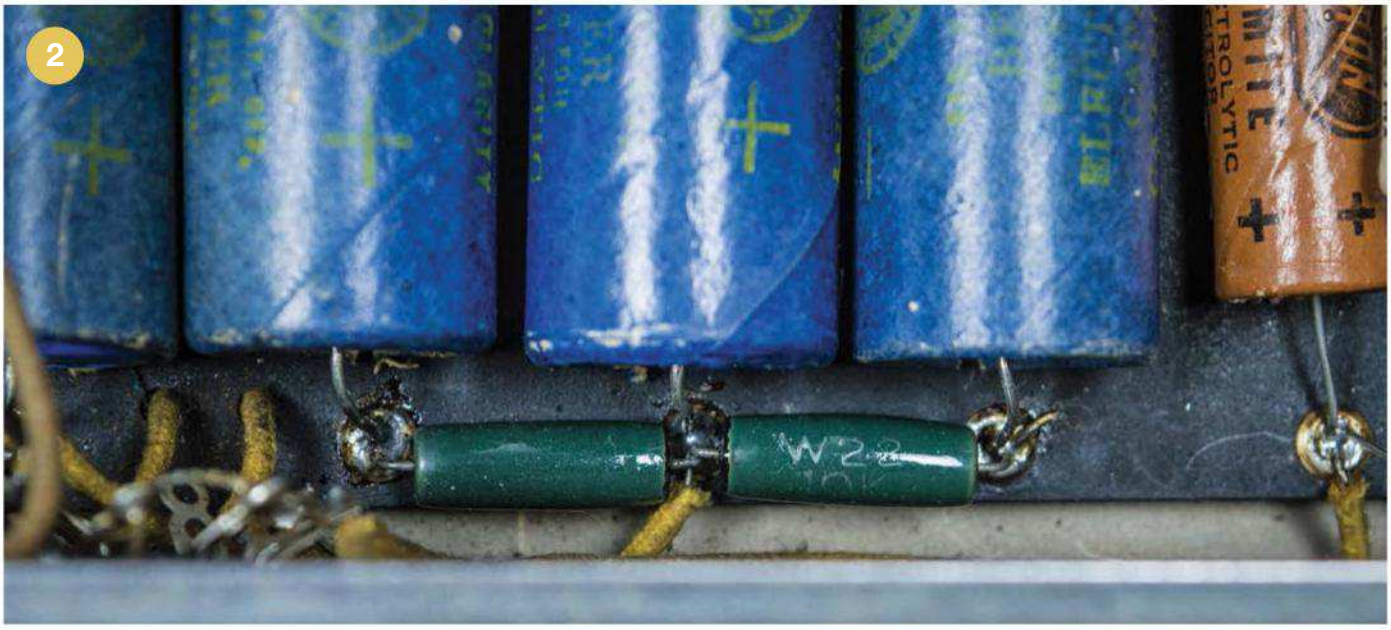
Sometimes buying vintage guitars and amps is like buying houses – you have to be able to see the potential behind the dodgy décor and unkempt garden. And despite the drab grey tolex and a changed handle, this Pro was remarkably original, the control panel was in excellent condition and both of the original transformers were still with the amp.

So, with no turning back now, the brief is a simple one – after restoring the electronics and re-tweeding, I want it to end up looking as close as possible to an unrestored amp. Let's get to it...

POWER SUPPLY

The Pro arrived with a full set of Cornel Dubilier 20uF 450-volt filter capacitors. All four are blistered and it makes no sense to leave them installed. Originality isn't a factor because these are clearly replacements. The giveaways are poor lead dress and the way they are soldered onto the chopped leadout wires of the original caps. Since this project is a complete restoration rather than a running repair, I decide to de-solder the original cap wires once the replacement filter caps are removed. I also remove both of the power supply's 10K resistors, because they appear heat damaged and now is the best time to do it. One measures 12K and the other 20K, and both appear to be disintegrating after a long and hard life.

For the power supply, the amp needs four 20uF filter capacitors and two 10K resistors. I go with Sprague 500-volt caps and Welwyn 7-watt wire wound resistors. Although



not vintage-spec carbon composite types, as the Welwyn's power rating is more than adequate and they look good – which is more than can be said for the Sprague's.

To keep things looking vintage, I decide to slice the cardboard tubes covering the Cornel Dubilier caps lengthways to remove the old caps, then I re-use the tubes to wrap up the Sprague's. Happily, it's an almost perfect fit, so I re-seal the cardboard tubes with tape and install the new resistors and filter caps, with the join lines on the underside.

Astron Minimite filter caps would have been fitted at the factory, but the blue tubes of the Cornel Dubiliers suit the vintage vibe. We could pay around $20 each for the original items, but they'd be unusable anyway, and $80 plus import duties and tax is a lot of money to spend on cardboard tubes for a player's grade tweed Pro.

UNSTUFFING CAPS

Besides the caps in the power supply, there are two 25uF electrolytics, eight signal caps, a 0.005uF on the tone pot and a 0.0001uF across the plates of the 6SC7 phase inverter. Most are Industrial Condenser Corporation (ICC) paper/foil types that are typically seen in early 50s tweed amps, however a Sprague Black Beauty replaces one and all four caps linking the inputs to the valve grids are paper/foil Astrons. More on those later.

The 25uF caps are re-tubed just like the filter caps, but the ICC ones cannot simply be pulled out of their tubes to maintain the vintage appearance. They're actually sealed with wax, and maybe a little resin adhesive, so they will need to go into the oven.

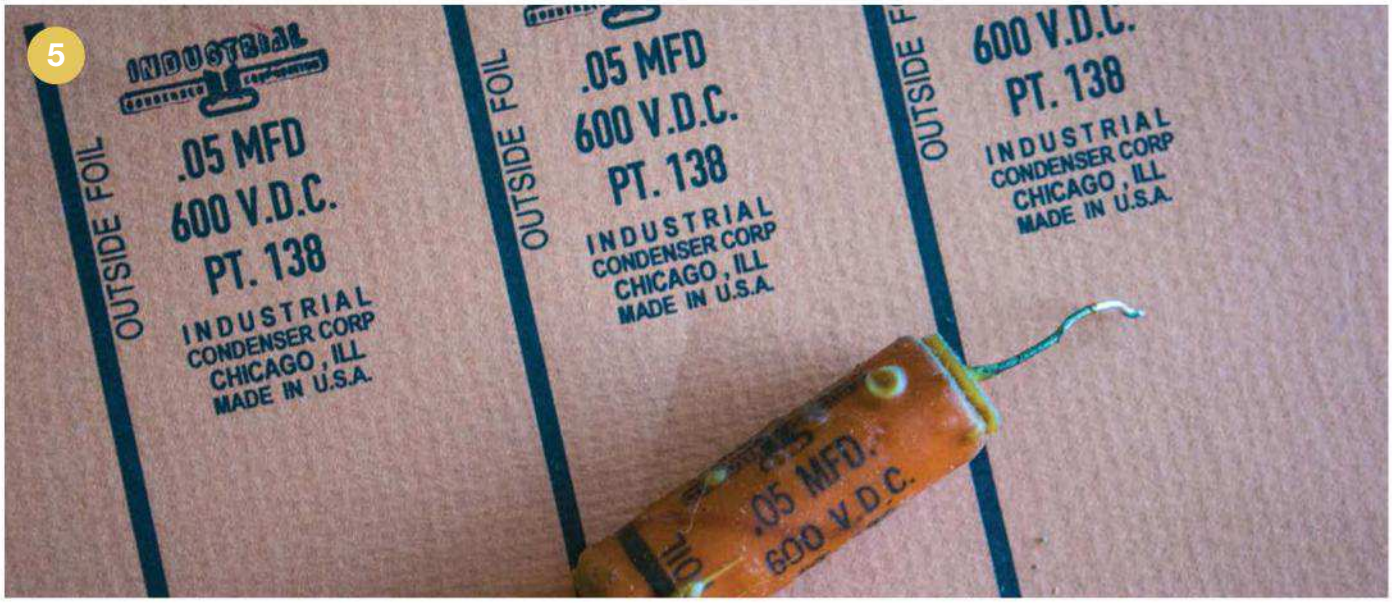
It's not as crazy as it sounds because wax melts at a fairly low temperature. I place the caps onto several layers of kitchen paper on an oven tray, and put them into a pre-heated oven set to around 100°C. When all the wax and resin has run out and pooled around the ends of the tubes, they're done!

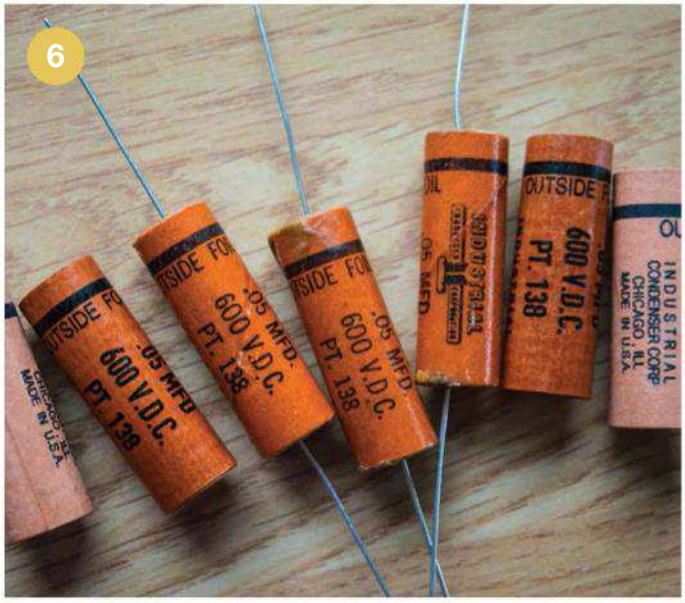
Your next job is to pull out the two leadout wires, then put a flat head screwdriver into one end of the tube and push out the foil and paper wrap. This should come out easily but if it doesn't, you'll need to bake the caps for a bit longer. The outside of the tubes should also be wiped down while they're hot. If all goes well, you'll be left with clean and empty capacitor tubes.

2 Power supply resistors have a tough life and we recommend changing them for high wattage wire wound types like these Welwyns

3 The cardboard outer tube has been removed from the silver capacitor to be fitted over the blue Sprague Atom

4 After oven baking the cardboard tubes have been cleaned out, wiped down and are ready to be re-used





5 To replace the missing tubes, new ones need to be made

6 A mix of original tubes, our freshly rolled repros and some repros after spraying with amber lacquer

7 With Mallory 150s sealed inside with wax, the repros look pretty similar to the originals

RE-STUFFING TUBES

The internal diameter of these tubes is just over 10mm, which means that many of the popular signal caps you'd consider won't fit inside. Fortunately, there are no such difficulties with affordable and great sounding Mallory 150s. With the outer foil ends marked, I wrap them with some tape and ease them into the old tubes – which also have outer foil makings.

Beeswax is heated in a bain-marie until it's runny, then sucked up into a plastic syringe to get it into the ends of the tubes. I fill one end, hang the caps up for the wax to set, then they're flipped over to fill the other end. With both ends sealed, I dip each capacitor momentarily into the liquid wax to coat the tubes and re-hang them to cool down

This method of capacitor stuffing is seldom seen in guitar amp restorations, but it's commonplace among vintage radio restorers. Since 60-year-old signal paper/foil capacitors are rarely of any practical use, it seems a shame merely to discard them and put modern caps in their place. The re-stuffed caps should continue working for decades and I think they look fantastic in historic amps. However, what can you do if some of the vintage caps are missing? Well...

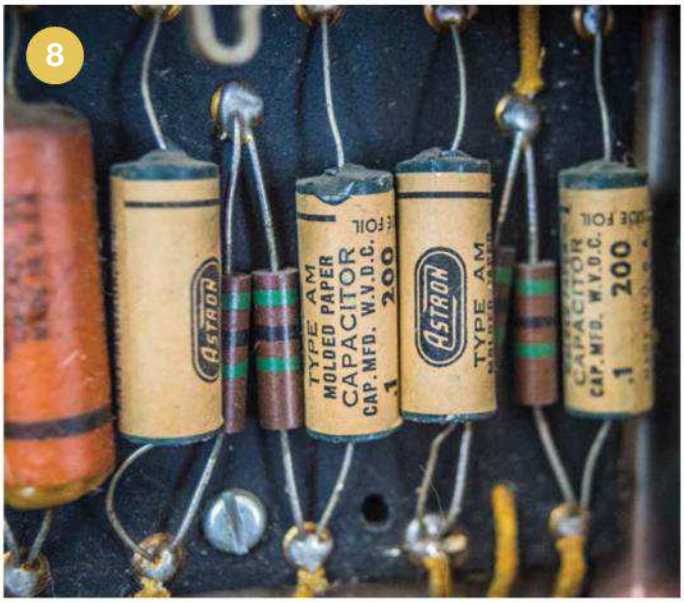
ROLL YOUR OWN

Most of the markings on the original cardboard tubes are just text, and the logo is easy to find online and download. Using a graphics program, I match the original font and scale as closely as I can to create labels and print them onto thick orange paper from my local art shop. The labels are cut to size and wrapped around a piece of 10mm dowel with some Titebond wood glue applied. The glue grabs the cardboard quickly and the tubes are slid off the dowel so they don't stick to the wood. The vintage tube dimensions are 1.5 x 0.5 inches.

To match the colour more closely, I spray the tubes with some amber nitrocellulose from Manchester Guitar Tech and set them aside to dry. Once they're ready, I stuff the repro tubes with Mallory capacitors and wax them as I did with the originals. They're not perfect, but they're pretty close.

ASTRON ADVENTURES

The circuit diagram specifies 0.05uF 600 volts, but the Astrons linking the input sockets to the valve grids are 0.1uF 200 volts moulded paper caps. Although they're unfamiliar to me, I'm convinced they were factory fitted. It's clear to see the



solder joints are undisturbed and the leadout wires are gently curved, which conforms with the wiring style throughout this Pro. What's more, these caps are identical to the ones used in the very earliest Fender 'slab' basses.

The swollen appearance made it clear that all the ICC signal caps had to be replaced, but the Astrons are housed in thermoplastic casings and so there's no swelling. Since they're unfamiliar to me, I decide to run them past my Heathkit capacitor tester at full operating voltage. All four turn out to be in perfect health and since they'll never be exposed to high voltages in the position they occupy in the circuit, there's no reason to swap them out.

COIL COMPLICATIONS

We have previously described the process of powering up newly built and long dormant vintage amplifiers, but the short of it is that I use a lightbulb current limiter and power the amp up in stages, adding one valve at a time. I also install a modern grounded mains cable if the amp doesn't already have one.

Results are mixed. Nothing scary happens, all the internal voltages are about right and the fully loaded Pro isn't drawing excessive current. Unfortunately, the amp sounds whisper quiet and unpleasantly distorted. Under normal circumstances I would plug the amp into an external speaker to verify that the output transformer is okay, but the field coil speaker complicates things.

The output transformer is mounted on the speaker frame rather than the amp chassis, which is typical for Fenders of this era. However, there are far more wires connecting the amp to the speaker than usual because Field Coil speakers have to be powered. Yep, this design actually predates the era of practically sized permanent magnets.

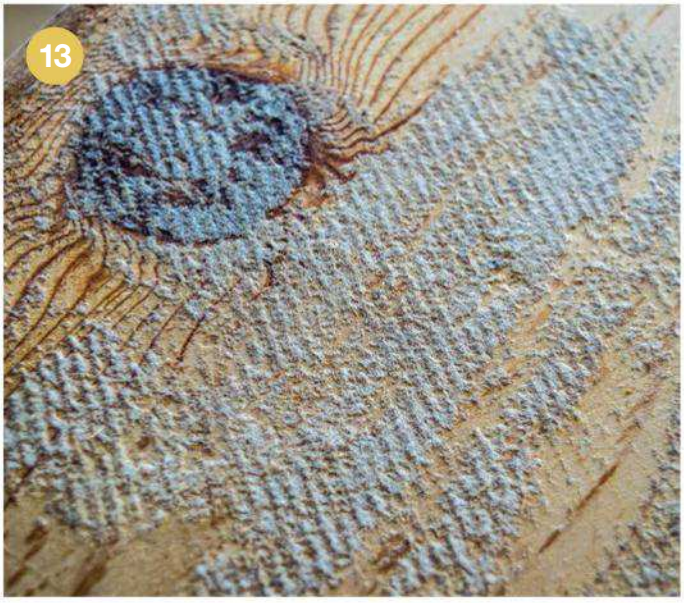
It's just about possible to see that the wires would have been colour coded when new, but 67 years of dust has turned them all more or less the same colour. I therefore have to trace the wires and refer to the circuit diagram to determine the function of each. I'm also curious about the field coil wiring shown on the circuit diagram because it differs from the field coil wiring that's usually depicted.

As always, Rift's Chris Fantana enlightens me and I learn that field coils can be connected in two different ways. Most are wired into the power supply, where they can energise the magnet and act

8 These original Astron capacitors coupling the input jacks to the valve grids all test good, so they're left in place

9 The bell cover of this Jensen F15N field coil speaker has been altered to fit under the extended late 1951 top panel

10 The output transformer is mounted onto the speaker basket and the wires are for power as well as audio



11 With the exception of the white cathode bias resistor, the restored circuit board looks much as it did when new

12 An old grocery store invoice and a full pack of matches are found under the tolex

13 Residue on the cabinet shows that the Pro was originally covered with low-contrast tweed

as a choke. Typically, the field coil resistance will measure in the low 100 ohms.

The Jensen F15N we have here takes a feed from the power supply and terminates to ground. Typical resistance for this type of field coil is higher at between 5K to 8K, and I measure 6.8K. Another thing Chris points out is that the field coil acts as a drain resistor when the amp is shut off, which is actually a useful safety feature.

To test the output transformer, it's perfectly safe to leave the field coil connected. I de-solder the two wires leading from the secondary of the output transformer to the terminals on the speaker frame and then connect them to an external 12-inch speaker.

With the new speaker hooked up my heart sinks as, once again, I hear almost no noise coming through the external speaker. Nevertheless, I risk a power chord and experience a bit of a *Back To The Future* moment as the Pro tries its best to blast me across the room.

To my absolute delight, this amp sounds pretty outrageous from the get go. The noise floor is remarkably low, but there's nothing underpowered with the output signal, that's for sure.

Checking the bias, I find it's running on the cool side, so I drop the bias resistor to 220 ohms. All the other voltages are right where they should be and I can already tell that this Fender Pro is loud, bright and has a fantastic overdrive tone – but a decision still has to be made about the speaker.

SPEAKER SOLUTIONS

With a non-functioning Jensen, 15-inch choices are limited compared to 12-inch speakers. Vintage P15 Jensens are available, but they all seem to be in the US and once postage, taxes and import duties have been added, it's an expensive and risky option. The same goes for vintage JBL D130s and Altecs, because you can never be sure if they're working properly, or if they've had a dodgy re-cone.

Of course, there are modern Jensens, but experience suggests they're not always the best option when authentic vintage tone is the goal. The ever-helpful guys on The Gretsch Discussion Pages recommend the Weber 15A150 and Cali as well as the Eminence Legend 151, but again they can be expensive to import.

Apparently the original F15N can be re-coned, but I can't find anybody in the UK who is prepared to do it. The search is on for a vintage Jensen P15, but in the meantime, a reissue

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14 The plywood front panel is in a sorry state and the surface will need to be restored before re-tweeding

15 Two-pack filler is applied over most of the front panel before it is sanded flat

16 At last the cabinet is ready for re-tweeding and the filled areas show up as a light beige against the darker wood

Jensen P15 does the job and with the original bell cover fitted over the magnet, it looks the part.

TWEED NEEDS

Stripping the tolex off turns out to be pretty easy because relatively little of it was glued to the cabinet in the first place. The exception being the tolex covering the front panel that is stuck on firmly. The overlaps show that this was the first piece to have been stuck on, and whoever did it went heavy on the glue.

Whatever they used was clearly good stuff, but it seems like they ran out pretty quickly and switched to contact adhesive instead. When that started running low, they ceased spreading the glue over the panels, and applied it only around the edges. By the time the back panels were being done, they'd resorted to hammering tacks.

Besides a load of sticky glue residue and some damage to the front panel's outer layer, the cabinet turns out to be in decent shape with solid joints and no cracks. Traces of the original tweed can be found everywhere, but best of all is the discovery of a box of matches and fragments of an old invoice trapped under the tolex. It reads 'Parks Cash Grocery, 222 South Sixth Street, Klamath Falls, Oregon', so it seems reasonable to conclude that this Pro was in the vicinity when the tolex was applied.

A blade is used to scrape off he contact adhesive and I use an orbital sander to remove the remaining tweed glue from all the panels besides the front. Due to the damage on the front panel, which I suspect was inflicted when the tweed was first removed, I clean it up with a sanding block.

The front surface is very uneven so I apply two-pack wood filler all over the panel. Once it has hardened, I flat it back with a sanding block, mark any remaining low spots with a pencil, apply some more filler in targeted areas and sand again.

Eventually I'm left with a fairly flat surface and I repeat the filling and sanding process wherever I find any dents in the wood. After a thorough brush down and going over with a vacuum cleaner followed by tack cloth, the cabinet is ready for its re-tweeding.

COVER VERSIONS

My original intention was to do the re-tweed myself, but thinking it through, I decide against it. Given the opportunity to re-spray a '51 Telecaster, I wouldn't hesitate because I've sprayed, relic'd and

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17 The control panel's chrome plating and silk screening is in fine condition considering its age

18 The handle fixings are original and, alongside some considered artificial ageing, a quality repro handle completes the look

19 The original magnet cover is fitted onto a repro Jensen P15N, but those speaker wires will need to be changed

restored so many guitars. However, I have never applied tolex or tweed to a cabinet, and every instinct tells me that a 1951 Fender Pro is an inappropriate place to start.

Instead I hand the cabinet over to Chris from Rift – a man who knows a thing or two about tweed in every respect. No doubt I will try my hand covering a cabinet at some point, and if I do, you're almost certain to read all about it in *TGM*. When you do your own guitar and amp work, there's no shame in accepting your limitations and letting people who are more experienced and skilled handle the make or break aspects of a project.

It turns out handing it over to a professional was a wise move, because the cabinet looks fantastic when it returns. Fender amps from the very early 1950s would have had low-contrast tweed but the original tweed is no longer available.

Instead this one is done with olive stripe tweed rather than the dark brown stripe. Fender amps of this vintage tend to be either very pale in colour, or a dark brownish orange. Since this isn't low-contrast tweed, I decide to go for the latter.

After two coats of clear wax-free shellac, a proper rub down with a Scotch pad, a few coats of tinted clear nitro and some misted coats of tobacco brown, the colour looks about right. I follow that up with another Scotch pad treatment to knock back the glossiness and inflict some considered damage with a wood rasp. Before long, the TV Pro has acquired a certain 'patina' and I decide to stop and let Father Time take care of the rest.

GETTING BACK TOGETHER

The original Fender badge was missing, but the owner found a repro online. These badges are getting much harder to find and this one came from Italy. The original badge pins had penetrated all the way through the front panel, so I tap sewing pins through the holes from back to front.

The repro badge has a pin hole at each corner, which allows the badge to be placed over the pins. Confident that the badge is correctly positioned, I gently tap the badge fixing pins in from the front. Afterwards, the handle holes are located and the handle is reinstated.

The owner manages to find some brown linen that is a pretty close match to original Fender speaker cloth and I staple it onto the baffle. The baffle is slipped over the six bolts and once all the baffle nuts are tightened, I re-install the speaker.

The output transformer was originally mounted on the actual speaker basket, but that's no longer possible. Instead, I mount it onto

the cabinet's side wall using a couple of wood screws. With the chassis mounted, the valves back in their sockets and the back panels screwed on, the restoration is complete.

PRO PRICING

It may be interesting to consider the overall cost of the project. The amp itself cost £1,325 including shipping and import duties. The electronics needed a couple of hours of work to get the amp running safely and sounding good, plus a further £120 or so for the modern Jensen.

By that point the amp was perfectly usable, but with the re-tweed, relicing and reassembly factored in, the total cost has ended up closer to £2,000. The going prices for TV Pros in good original condition tend to be above £3,000 and well restored examples can be found for anywhere between £2,300 and £3,000.

The Pro is now worth more than the owner has spent on it and in all likelihood, it will increase in value. For reference, the narrow panel Fender Custom Pro reissue was priced at £2,299 when we reviewed it last year, and good luck finding a boutique repro for less than that.

Sonically, this Pro is something special. It's like the grown up version of my '51 5A3 Deluxe, with a similar overdrive characteristic, a wider frequency range, plus a more detailed and revealing quality. Even so, I can't help wondering what it will sound like when that vintage Jensen eventually shows up...

NEXT MONTH...

Huw returns to his Martin kit build project, where attention turns to body binding, neck build and setting the neck

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ALL ABOUT... TED MCCARTY

Ted McCarty was arguably the most influential CEO of any guitar company, and he designed more iconic hardware and guitars than pretty much anyone else. Huw Price talks Ted...

In a parallel universe, who can say what would have happened if Brach's candy company had successfully managed to lure Ted McCarty away from Wurlitzer in 1948 – but instead he ended up at Gibson, where he became the company's most beloved and influential head honcho, and a designer who changed the electric guitar forever.

Ted was born in Somerset, Kentucky in 1909 and by the time he was three, his mother had died. Soon after, Ted and his five-year-old bother went to live with their great aunt and uncle in Cincinnati. It was there he attended university, graduating in engineering while managing the college book shop.

Based in Cincinnati, Wurlitzer was a successful manufacturer of musical instruments and jukeboxes. Ted successfully applied for a job in 1936, but it was his experience in retailing rather than his engineering skills that got him hired. Ted stayed with Wurlitzer for 12 years, travelling all over the US with his family and living in several different cities. Brach's had asked Ted to join as chairman, but with the company's owner holidaying in the Bahamas, nobody was authorised to give the go ahead.

TAKING BERLIN

Ted was still waiting when he had lunch with Maurice Berlin, the owner of Gibson's parent company Chicago Musical Instruments. The men had become friendly when Ted was a buyer for Wurlitzer. During their lunch, Berlin said, "Since you're not busy, why don't you go over to Kalamazoo on my expense account and see if you can find out what's going on over there, and why I'm losing so much money?".

Ted agreed, spending time at the factory and speaking at length with John Huis, who was then foreman in the finishing department. His report concluded the company was top-heavy and highlighted low morale due to fractious employee relations with general manager, Guy Hart. Clearly Berlin was impressed because he offered Ted a job with the promise, "If you can turn the place around and make a profit, I'll make you president of the company."

That's exactly what happened. Gibson had ceased instrument production during the Second World War because government restrictions on steel precluded installing trussrods, so the firm helped with the war effort instead. Post-war, Gibson was struggling to get making guitars again, and when Ted joined on 15 March 1948 he immediately set about restructuring the management and improving the working environment.

By May, Gibson was making money again, Guy Hart resigned in November and John Huis was promoted to superintendent. Ted was made executive vice president in June 1949, and then president a year later. Things stayed that way until he left in 1966 with Gibson operating at a profit throughout.

THE GIBSON YEARS

Joining Gibson gave Ted the opportunity to get back to his engineering roots. His business acumen was obvious, but when we look at the parts and models Ted designed and instigated, his achievements as a guitar innovator are equally impressive.

Let's start with the stop tailpiece. In a 1978 interview for *Guitar Player*, Ted recalled: "Les Paul triggered the idea with his trapeze bar tailpiece. I got to looking at the bar type and decided that it had a couple of problems. I figured that if we fastened it on studs it would sustain just as well, maybe better, and we could raise and lower the studs; then with two setscrews, you could intonate it a little.

Most agree a stop tailpiece does wonders for sustain, and is tonally superior to the Tune-O-Matic bridge – although Ted invented that, too, in July 1952. Later, when it emerged that the saddles had a tendency to fall out, he devised the retaining wire to solve the problem.

Ted's tenure had already seen the introduction of the ES-175, the Les Paul Goldtop and Custom, and the Junior and Special models that were the first affordable Gibsons to be designed for beginners.

Business was good, but as a marketing guy, Ted was aware that Gibson guitars were seen as old fashioned in some areas of the market –

McCarty had a hand in the design of many iconic Gibsons, including the ES-335

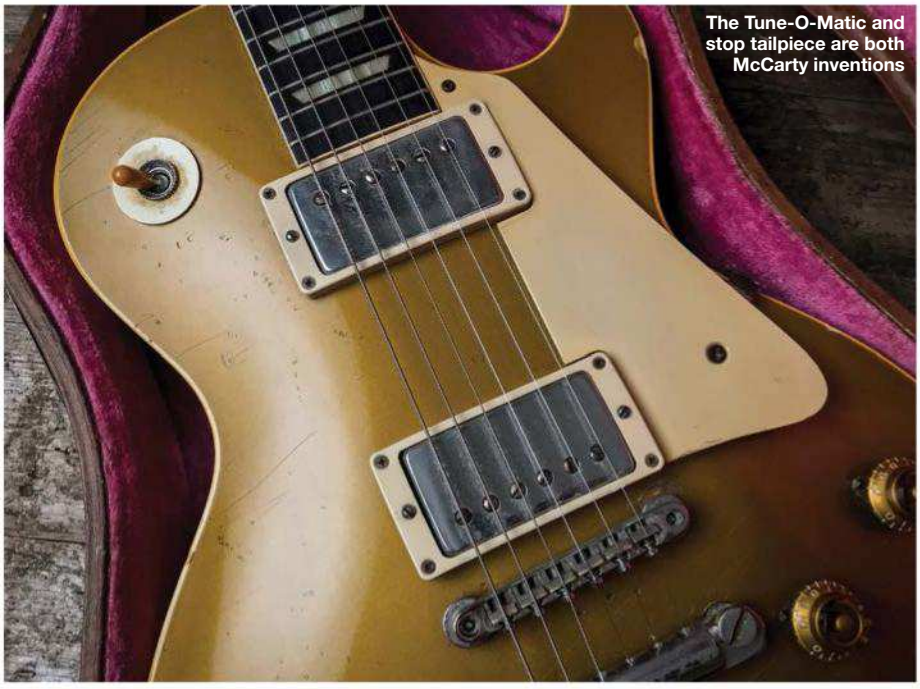
particularly compared to Fenders. To redress the balance, he came up with the concept for the Flying V, Explorer and the fabled Moderne.

Ted recounted to Tom Wheeler how he "designed those three guitars with the help of a local artist… the dealers thought we were too stodgy, too traditional, so we decided to knock them off their feet". Although they weren't a commercial success, the Flying V and Explorer were just ahead of their time and would subsequently be relaunched. In the context of mid 1950s guitar making, this was guitar design at its boldest and most audacious.

Although the ES-335 is somewhat more traditional in appearance, its design concept is no less radical and you guessed it – Ted McCarty had a hand in designing that, too. Although he credited his engineering team with the overall design of the ES-335, ES-345 and ES-355 series, he claimed it was his idea to "put the solid maple bar down the middle".

The semi-solids were much more successful than the 'korina trio' but Ted still felt Gibson needed a small and lighter solidbody once Les Paul sales had begun to tail off. That's when he set about designing the SG and this time it was just radical enough. The name may have changed from Les Paul to SG soon after its introduction, but the model has been in continuous production since 1961 and it's Gibson's biggest selling model of all time.

Although Ted didn't design the Firebird, he had a clear concept of what he wanted. Rather than do the drawings himself, Ted employed car designer Ray Dietrich, telling him that Gibson "needed something new and refreshing". It may be radical in design, but the Firebird is more practical from a player's perspective than any of the korina models. The various drawings Dietrich came up with were presented to the CMI sales people and based on their closer relationships with the dealers, they decided which to put into production.



The Tune-O-Matic and stop tailpiece are both McCarty inventions

BACK TO BUSINESS

However involved Ted became with hardware development and designing electric guitars, he still had a company to run. Fender's electric bass models were very successful and Ted felt Gibson should take a share of that market.

Complications arose because all of Gibson's acoustic bass building tooling and equipment had gone missing during the war. At the time Epiphone was still in the bass business and knowing that owner Orphie Stathopoulo wanted to sell the company, Ted let him know Gibson would be interested.

In 1957 Ted got the call and Gibson bought the Epiphone name and all the company equipment – but not the company itself, because Ted didn't want to take on its liabilities. Employees were dispatched to New York and Philadelphia to collect everything from Epiphone's production facilities. It was only after everything was set up in rented premises in Kalamazoo that Ted discovered they had all of Epiphone's guitar jigs, too.

Calling a meeting with Maurice Berlin, it was decided that Gibson could now start producing Epiphone guitars as well as basses. One reason for this was that Gibson operated a franchise program to avoid having competing dealers within the same location. Since that meant good dealers were denied the chance to stock Gibsons, it meant they could be offered Epiphones instead.

By around 1960, all Epiphones were being made at the Gibson facility and such was the quality, they were direct competition for Gibsons. It was only after Norlin's takeover of Gibson that the Epiphone brand was used for cheaper guitars produced overseas.

Clearly Ted was a shrewd businessman, and it has been documented that under his stewardship Gibson's workforce expanded tenfold, production went from 5,000 to 100,000 guitars per annum, sales grew by 1,250 per cent, and profits increased by 15 times. Nevertheless, by the mid 1960s Ted could sense trouble brewing and he began looking for new opportunities.

JOINING GIBSON GAVE TED THE OPPORTUNITY TO GET BACK TO HIS ENGINEERING ROOTS

LIFE AFTER GIBSON

Ted and John Huis, who was by then Gibson's vice-president, bought Bigsby Accessories Inc, in 1965. They tendered their resignations, with Ted leaving Gibson on 30 June 1966. Ted's relationship with Paul Bigsby went back a long way because Gibson had been the first manufacturer to put Bigsbys on factory made guitars. He even helped to re-design the fixed Bigsby handle so it could be moved out of the way.

Bigsby production was moved from California to Kalamazoo and after a rocky patch during the late 1960s, the two former Gibson men managed to make a success of it. Ted actually spent more than twice as long with Bigsby as he did with Gibson. He and John Huis also diversified, buying a company called Flex-Lite that manufactured specialist lighting. At times Flex-Lite's profits were needed to keep Bigsby afloat.

PRS SWANSONG

Paul Reed Smith became aware of Ted because his name kept appearing on Gibson patents. Smith has always sought out teachers and mentors so in 1986 Ted got a call offering him consultancy work. Smith "wanted to know what glues he used, what he glued the frets in with, how he levelled the fretboards, how he dried them, how he bound them and how he glued the necks on".

By that time Ted's wife's health was failing and Ted was losing his eyesight, so travelling was problematic. Instead Smith flew out to meet him and spent a week with Ted at his residence in Maui, Hawaii and the men established a lasting friendship.

It's worth considering that PRS was then a custom guitar builder but with Ted hired as a consultant, Smith essentially "downloaded the hard disk" and transitioned into factory scale production. Having played such a massive part in developing all of Gibson's most iconic electric guitars, it's curious that the only guitar that bears his name is the PRS McCarty Model. Although Ted asserted the guitar was entirely Smith's design, Smith says: "everything Ted was teaching me is incorporated. He taught me how to make PAFs".

Like Leo Fender, Ted couldn't actually play the guitar, but he applied his engineering chops to improve the tone and playability of Gibson's products and address the needs of musicians. In other words, he provided guitarists with what they needed rather than what he thought they needed and he valued quality over gimmicks. And when the korina models were introduced, Ted didn't don a denim jacket to smash an L5 onstage. Ted died in April 2001 aged 91, but his huge legacy will never be forgotten.

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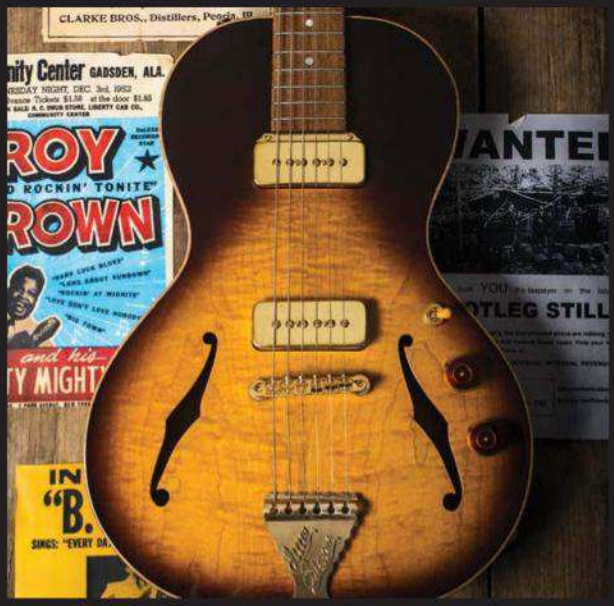

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CHORD CLINIC

This month we find out that 11th chords can be major, minor or sharp. Rod Fogg is careful with that axe...

Last month we took a look at 11th chords – or to give them their full name, dominant 11th chords. We can also have minor 11th and major 11th chords, and perhaps disturbingly, the 11th can appear a fret higher than normal to become a sharp 11.

Figure 1 gets started with a Dm11 chord, which in theory should have D, F and A as the minor triad, and then C, E and G as the seventh, ninth and 11th. That makes six notes in all, which is going to be pretty unwieldy on a six string guitar, so we tend to leave out the fifth as it doesn't contribute much to the sound of the chord. Notice that we need to keep the third in the chord unlike last month's dominant 11ths which left it out.

If you keep the barre down and slide all three fingers down a fret the G that was the 11th of the D minor 11th chord becomes the sharp 11th of a delicious Db7#11 chord. Now you have a choice, you can either go for the sweet vanilla flavouring C6/9 chord, or if you're in the mood for something spicier go for the Cmaj9#11. We often sharpen the 11th when adding it to major ninth chords because it avoids the clash between the natural 11th and the major third which are only a semitone apart. In this case, for example, E and F♯ sound better together than would E and F natural.

Figure 2 grabs the same progression and hops it over a string, taking us from the key of C major to the key of G major. Although the shapes are slightly different the chords are identical, which you can check by examining the intervals described under each chord diagram. As before you can make the choice between the bland or spicy ending.

Figure 3 is a very similar chord sequence to figure 2, but it demonstrates that sometimes less can be more. More, in the sense that it is a nifty chord sequence that fits under the

Figure 1

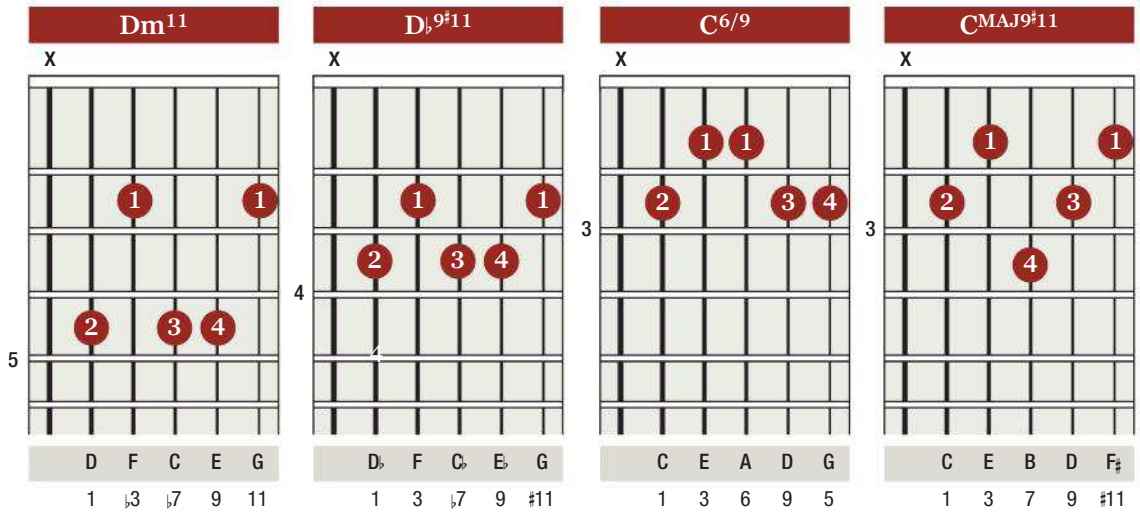


Figure 2

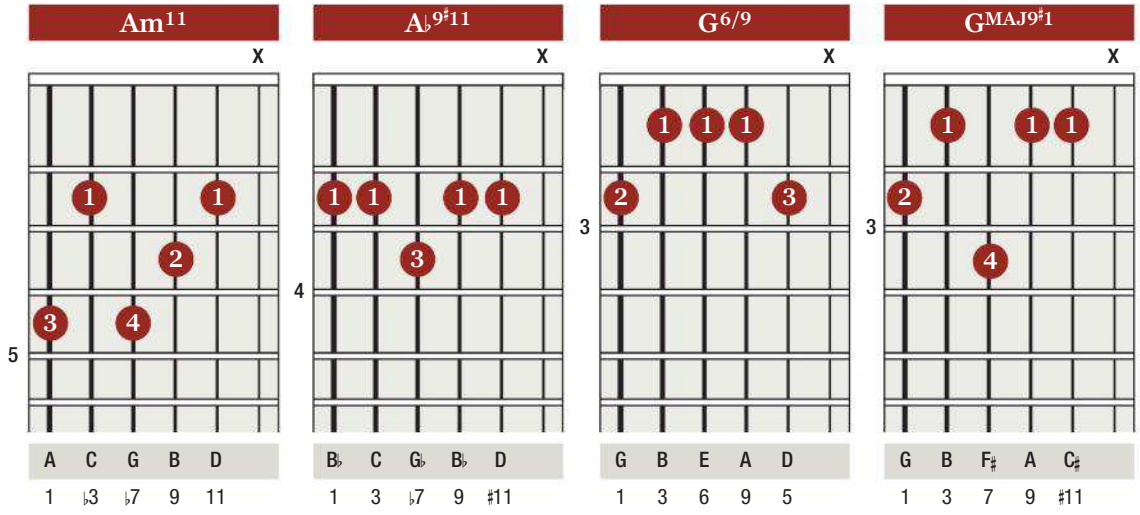


Figure 3

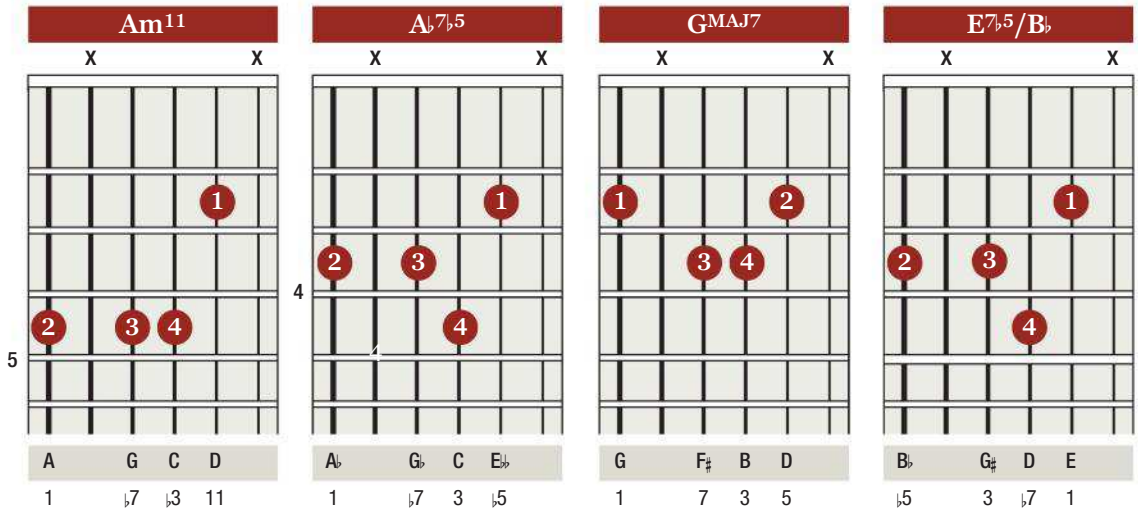
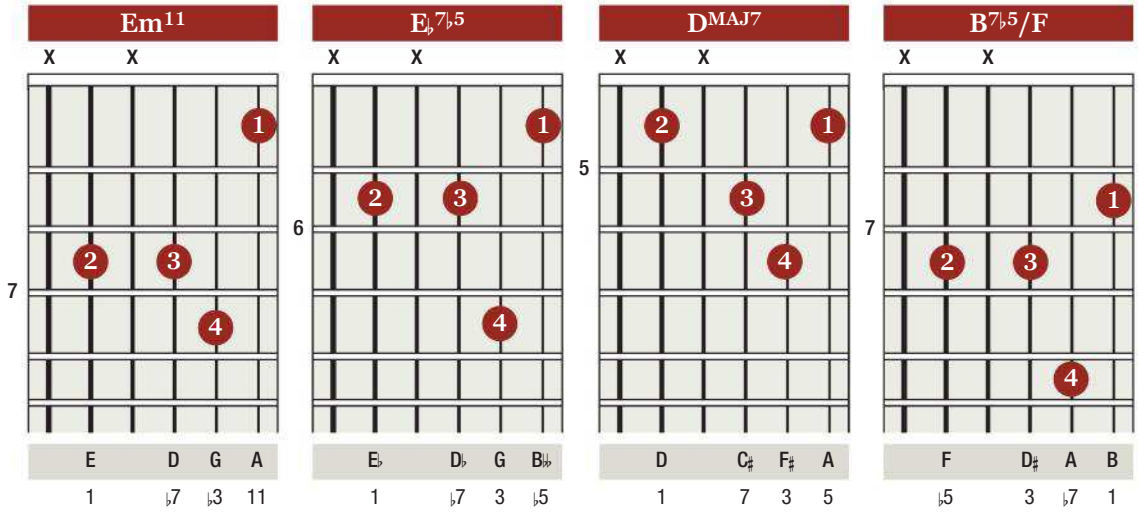


Figure 4



fingers well, still has a great voice leading and even adds a fourth chord to make a four bar sequence. Essentially, we have removed the ninths from all the chords, and it turns out that Am11 sounds good with only the minor third, the seventh and the 11th, so it's okay to leave out the ninth as well as the fifth. Two of the chords in this sequence have flattened fifths including the E7, which has one in the bass. They seem to suit this kind of progression, being reminiscent of 1960s bossa nova and the jazz-tinged compositions of Bacharach/David. Try playing fingerstyle using your thumb on the bass notes alternating with your fingers on the upper notes. Beck's *Tropicalia* should give you some rhythmic inspiration.

It makes sense to attempt the same chord sequence in a different location on the guitar so here we go with figure 4, where we are now in the key of D major. For your picking hand, try this one with the same thumb against fingers routine. This might be a good time to

point out that the ♯11 and the flat five are in fact the same note. If it's just a seventh chord and there's no other kind of fifth in the chord it's okay to call it a flat five; if there's a ninth in the chord and the possibility of a natural or "perfect" fifth it is better to call it a ♯11.

For figure 5 we have returned to C major, back where we started with figure 1, and re-voiced the Dm11 as a four note chord. Notice that the 11th doesn't have to be at the top of the chord. This voicing leads nicely to D♭7♭5 and on to Cmaj7. Just to keep you on your toes the A7 chord has a sharp five this time, and again this makes a good four-bar chord sequence for you to loop around. All of the chords we've looked at so far avoided open strings so they can be played at any fret – try playing them in other keys. Figure 6 is the exception, as it uses open strings in the bass to create a cool two-bar groove. Keep it light and funky and off you go, cruising into the sunset. Have a good month and I'll see you next time for more tasty chord stuff.

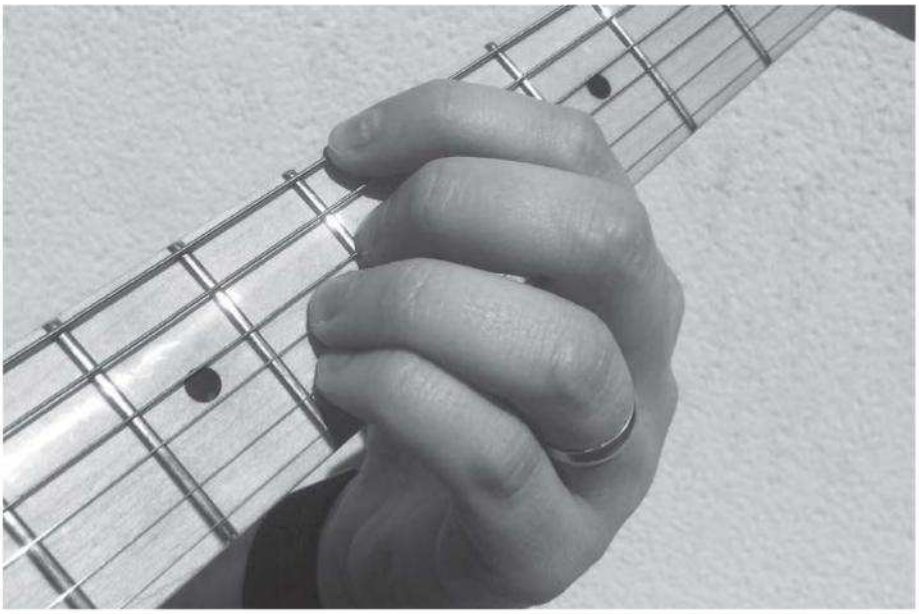


Figure 5

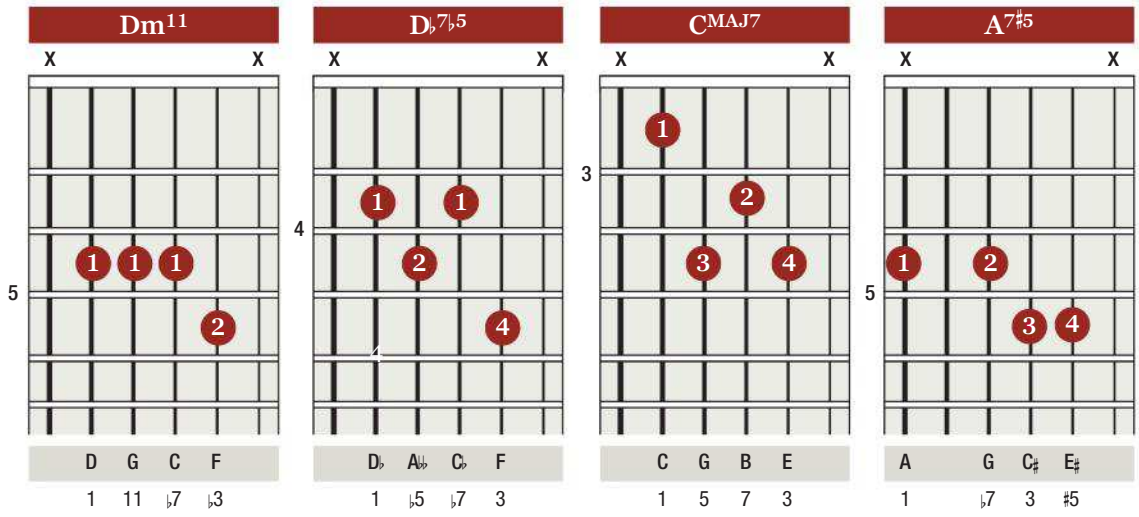
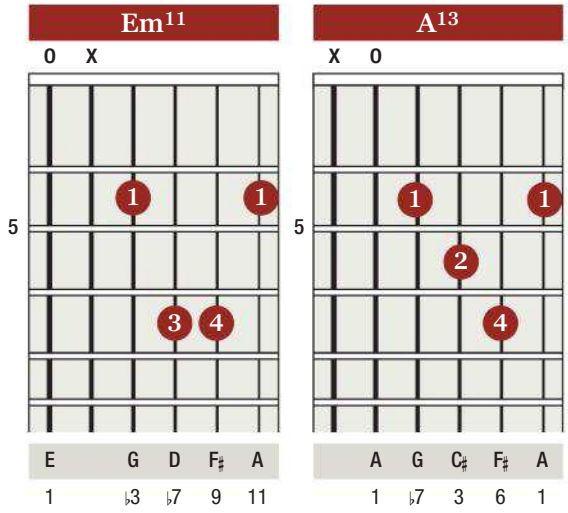


Figure 6



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JOAN ARMATRADING

The Grammy-nominated guitarist on her long career, ignoring bad advice, and why guitar isn't the best thing to write on...

1 I couldn't live without my...
"Well, Although most people know me for the guitar, I think it's the piano that I would miss the most. It is very visual, or should that be oral. It's the easiest way to work out chords, I think it's the best way to work out melodies."

2 In another life I'd have been...
"I am in my 46th year in music as a career, I haven't thought about what I could have done instead for a very long time. I have a quote that I use very often, which is, 'I write because I love it' – that about sums it up. I've been writing songs since the age of 14. Even on days when I'm not writing I'm thinking about writing. That's not to say that every time something comes into my head that I think might be a song it bears fruit, but I know that thought is always there. My plan is to write up until the day I die."

3 The moment it all started...
"I was born to be a musician. I started writing when my mother bought a piano and put it in the front room. The only reason she got it was because she thought it was a great piece of furniture. As soon as the piano arrived I started to write songs. Once I started to write songs there really was no going back. I'm an observer, I love to people watch and I like writing down the descriptions of what I see. It's one of my greatest pleasures when people tell me how much a song I've written describes their life or their longing. I love it when people use my songs to communicate with each other. I love it when I hear someone whistling my songs. I love the cover versions that people do of my songs, even the bad attempts. As I said before I was born to be a musician, I was born to write."

4 The one that got away...
"Actually, I don't have anything I've given away or sold that I regret not having."

5 My Spinal Tap moment...
"I don't really get into bad gigs, I just see all concerts as a great experience. There will be times when the audience doesn't seem to be as responsive as one might like but even at those gigs, I can always find enjoyment somewhere. In the end the audience will join in. I have never left the stage to no applause. One memorable concert would be a gig in somewhere like Sweden where the snow was so heavy that the trucks bringing the gear to the show couldn't get through. That night we had no instruments at all, nothing. I ended up coming on stage and doing one song, which was *Willow*, while the audience held aloft their lit lighters and sang along. It has to rank as one of the most romantic concerts (albeit one song) I've ever done."

6 The best advice that I've ever been given...
"The advice that I was given, by a few people as a musician was being told as a girl, it wouldn't be possible to be able to play the guitar well, especially the electric guitar so don't even try. I chose not to listen."

7 The first thing you tend to play when I pick up a guitar...
"When I pick up a guitar, practically every single time, it's an E9 chord. If it was a bass I would pluck that low E string as a pumping beat."

8 The most important thing on my rider...
"Water and fruit."

9 My guilty pleasure...
"I don't feel guilty about it but I love classical, baroque and romantic music. I love anything by Bach. Rachmaninoff's *Piano Concerto No. 2* is one of my favourite pieces. Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5* or anything by him really. I like Handel's *Zadok The Priest*. The list is endless."

10 If I could just play one thing...
"I'm pretty confident if there was something I really really wanted to play I'd learn to play it, no matter how long it took."

Joan Armatrading's new album, *Not Too Far Away* is out 18 May on BMG

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